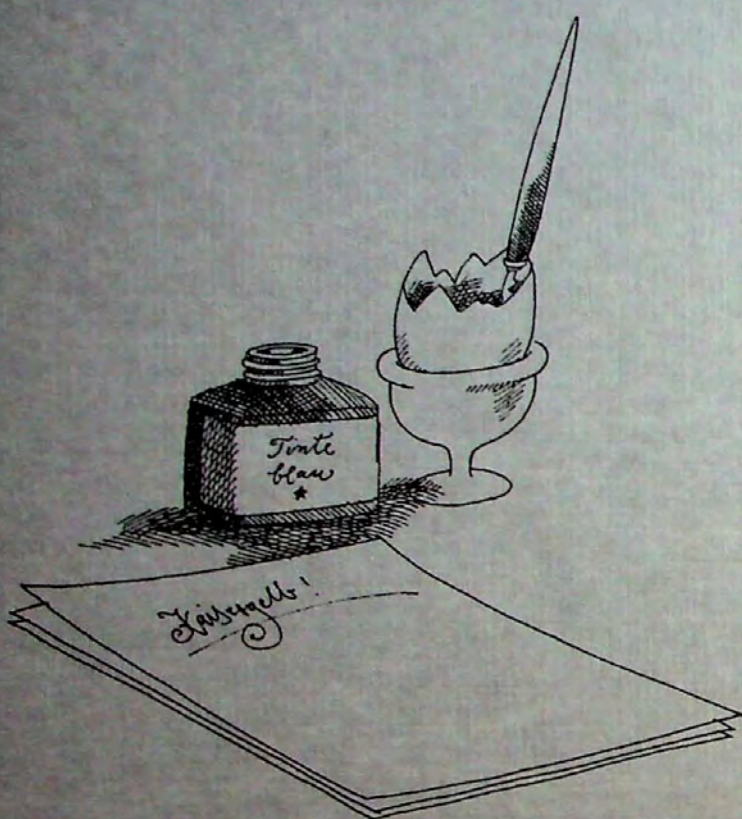


Imperial Yellow

Anyone who has seen the palace of Schönbrunn in Vienna will remember its striking yellow colour. Since the 19th century this colour has given countless churches and public buildings in the former Habsburg Empire their unmistakable appearance. Even today, in an utterly different political landscape, yellow-ochre paint marks the territory of the Dual Monarchy from Vienna to Lvov and from Prague to Sarajevo. The colour is the symbol of a long-lost community of interest.

Kaisergelb (Imperial Yellow) is also the title of a monograph, published by Vontobel in 1991, on the territories that constituted the Austro-Hungarian empire. It was the second volume of a trilogy on the states of eastern central Europe that were returning to Europe: *Matrioschka* ("Matrioshka") on the former Soviet Union, *Kaisergelb* on the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy and *Krokowa* ("Cracowa") on the border region between Poland and Germany. The series was intended as a contribution to an understanding of Europe as a continental whole, and to help us incorporate into our mental picture of the world and history the territories of the former Eastern Bloc, thereby freeing them of the stigma of totalitarianism. Since then, another two books have helped bring us closer to this goal: *Die Rückkehr der Geschichte* ("History Returns") and *Sicherheitsnadeln* ("Safety Pins"), a collection of political jokes from the former Eastern Bloc.

Kaisergelb, written by Arthur Meyer, a Swiss journalist who has been reporting from Vienna for the past 20 years, and illustrated by the cartoonist Nico, was conceived as a guide – or, to allude to its anecdotal theme – a "timetable" to the



Imperial Yellow

elements of a common past. It proved very popular and was soon out of print. This goes to show that in 1989 people were in need of pointers to help explain the new perspectives opening up in a European region of great historical importance. The gratifying thirst for knowledge of this area's history encouraged us to revise the monograph – adding a new second section covering the intervening years – and to produce the present version in English.

The 1991 "timetable" has withstood the test of time. But it was necessary to take subsequent developments into account. The spectrum of colours, of which imperial yellow is still the most prominent, has grown brighter. In the second part of the book, the author elucidates how current political and military border disputes are essentially a resumption of struggles over frontiers that existed in the "imperial yellow" age. This phase is not over by any means. The future of *Zwischen-europa* ("Europe between the powers" – that belt of states from the Baltic to the Adriatic) has yet to be settled. It is hoped that the musings, historical reflections and photojournalistic images along the tracks of Austria-Hungary's former imperial railway system will open minds to the geopolitical and historical context. Many politicians in the present Balkan crisis have failed precisely because of their ignorance of this context.

The second part of Imperial Yellow includes a separate chapter on Austria's first millennium. "Ostarrîchi", first mentioned in the sources in 996, is the country in which imperial yellow first gained currency. The country plays a special role in reintegrating its eastern neighbours into Europe. Austria's membership of the European Union does not weaken its position as a bridge between the two worlds, even if, for the time being, its politicians are paying more attention to the West. Condemned to decades of insignificance, the railway tracks from Vienna northwards and eastwards have again become important axes of European development.

Zurich, November 1996



Hans-Dieter Vontobel

Imperial Yellow
Arthur Meyer

Illustrations by Nico

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Returning Home to Europe
1991

*Time and history have re-entered
our lives. The grey skies of boredom
and the deafening paralysis have
been brushed aside, and we
can but marvel at the range of op-
portunities offered to us under
free political skies and at the endless
surprises which – for better or for
worse – they hold for us.*

Václav Havel

New Year's speech, 1991.

Timetable for a broader Europe

The subtitle of the August-September 1914 edition of the *Österreichisches Kursbuch*, the last timetable issued by the Office of Mail Schedules of the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Commerce, reads like a guide to a bygone world: "Railway, steamship and postal coach services in Austria, Hungary and Bosnia-Herzegovina and railway timetables for Serbia, Roumania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, Turkey and Egypt as well as itineraries at home and abroad." The table of contents reads like the clues to a crossword puzzle. Who today knows where Bukovina is, or the name of the river that flows through its capital Chernovtsy/Czernowitz (Pruth)? Does anyone associate Tarnopol in Galicia, Varasdin and Peterwardein on the River Drava or Kronstadt/Braşov in Transylvania, Romania, with Austrian garrisons?

To return to the timetable, who today has heard of trains operated by the Kaiserlich-Königliche Staatsbahndirektion Stanislau, the Ausschliesslich Private Buschtährader Eisenbahn or the Gurein-Bittischka-Eichhorn and Kanitz-Eibenschlitz-Oslawan light railway, let alone the Máramorosziget-szigetkamara-nagybocskó-kisbocskól h.é. vasut?

Slavonia was the first of the old names to resurface, as war erupted in the summer of 1991 along the line that had divided West and East for centuries. But who realized at the time that Agram – Hungarian and Habsburg Austrian for Zagreb – is (like Prague) one hundred kilometres closer to Switzerland as the crow flies than Vienna. Or that Innsbruck and Bregenz are considerably further from the Austrian capital than the Baniã, an area fought over by the Serbs and Croats?

In 1918, the territory of the empire that just four years previously had been served by a single railway timetable was divided up between eight successor states: Austria, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. In the last three, the dispute over the 1918 settlement was resumed 73 years later with varying means and intensity.

This region makes up a substantial and – despite the distortions prevalent in recent decades – a highly significant part of the European continent. To quote an American historian: “Austria and its successor states produced many, if not most of the original thinkers of the twentieth century: Freud, Brentano, Husserl, Buber, Wittgenstein, Lukács and countless others” (William M. Johnston: *The Austrian Mind*. University of California Press, 1972).

These thinkers, like the many writers, composers, painters, architects, physicians, scientists and technicians that few of us associate with Moravia, the Banat, Transylvania, Carniola or Dalmatia, grew up in a world that ceased to exist three times in the 20th century (although much survived under the surface): in 1918, 1938 and again in 1948 when the communists seized power in central Europe.

One author, Stefan Zweig, despairing that his world had been lost forever, committed suicide in 1942 after completing the manuscript of *The World of Yesterday: Memories of a European*.

His Europe was identical with that time and place another Austrian poet and cultural philosopher, Hermann Broch, once called “the cheerful apocalypse”. The boots of Nazi Germany crushed the life out of this European world of experience.

Memory probably makes the period between 1848 and 1918 seem more cheerful than it was in reality. The Habsburg empire, that most curious of European political structures, remained vulnerable in those areas (militarism and nationalism) in which others grew strong. Yet it was a period of extraordinary creativity – rooted though it was in a premonition of doom – on the part of its most sensitive poets and thinkers, at a time when other states (among them Bismarck’s German empire) had little to offer. Paradoxically, intellectual and economic life flourished while the emperor and his advisors persisted in flouting the soundest principles of imperial government. A stolidly conventional, deeply philistine and unimaginative monarch at a time of rapid industrial progress, enormous economic, social and cultural change, Emperor Franz Joseph I acted as though he were his own most senior “imperial councillor”, adhering with iron discipline to a daily routine of “office hours” spent in his study signing various administrative decrees of no importance. He had as little appreciation of the scientific achievements of the age as

he had of the fine arts that foretold the end of his order and the emergence of the modern era. Although he lived in the century of technological progress, he would not let it touch his immediate surroundings: he did not even have flush toilets installed at Schönbrunn or in the Vienna Hofburg.

Ruler against – and not of – the age

In 1848, as an eighteen-year-old, Franz Joseph acted on the advice of his mother and his conservative tutors and crushed the spirit of liberalism and the Hungarian uprising (Austria and some of the post-1918 successor states still suffer from the lack of a liberal tradition). Similarly, with the obduracy of old age, he resisted not only the Czechs' growing self-awareness and the beginnings of social democracy, but even more adamantly the petit bourgeois populism of the Christian Social movement. As a ruler against rather than of the age, he unwittingly fuelled the ideologies of nationalism, racism and unconditional class struggle, enabling destructive intolerance to displace the life-giving tolerance in the heartland of Europe as well as beyond.

More astute and farsighted than most of his contemporaries, Karl Kraus spoke of Austria as an "experimental station for doomsday".

Even today most Viennese think that the simultaneous presence in the city of Adolf Hitler, the "Demon of Europe" in person, and Leo Trotsky, Lenin's military mastermind, is no more than a coffee-house anecdote. While the one painted postcards for a living, the other discussed the principles of *Das Kapital* with literati and his future ideological opponents, the Social Democratic Austromarxists. Neither person was taken seriously: When the head of the Russian department at the Austrian foreign ministry was handed the news of the successful October Revolution in Russia, he laughed and joked to his clerk: "Revolution? Who on earth in Russia could start a revolution? Surely not Mr Bronstein [Trotsky's real name] from Café Central?" And the postcard painter from Braunau on the Inn would later wipe Austria's name off the map.

The roots of Europe's destruction at the hand of the ideologies of the 20th century lay partly in the minds of people who conceived their ideas in the coffee-houses of Austria-Hungary before the First World War in reaction to newspaper reports and the policies of Europe's ruling dynasties. At the same

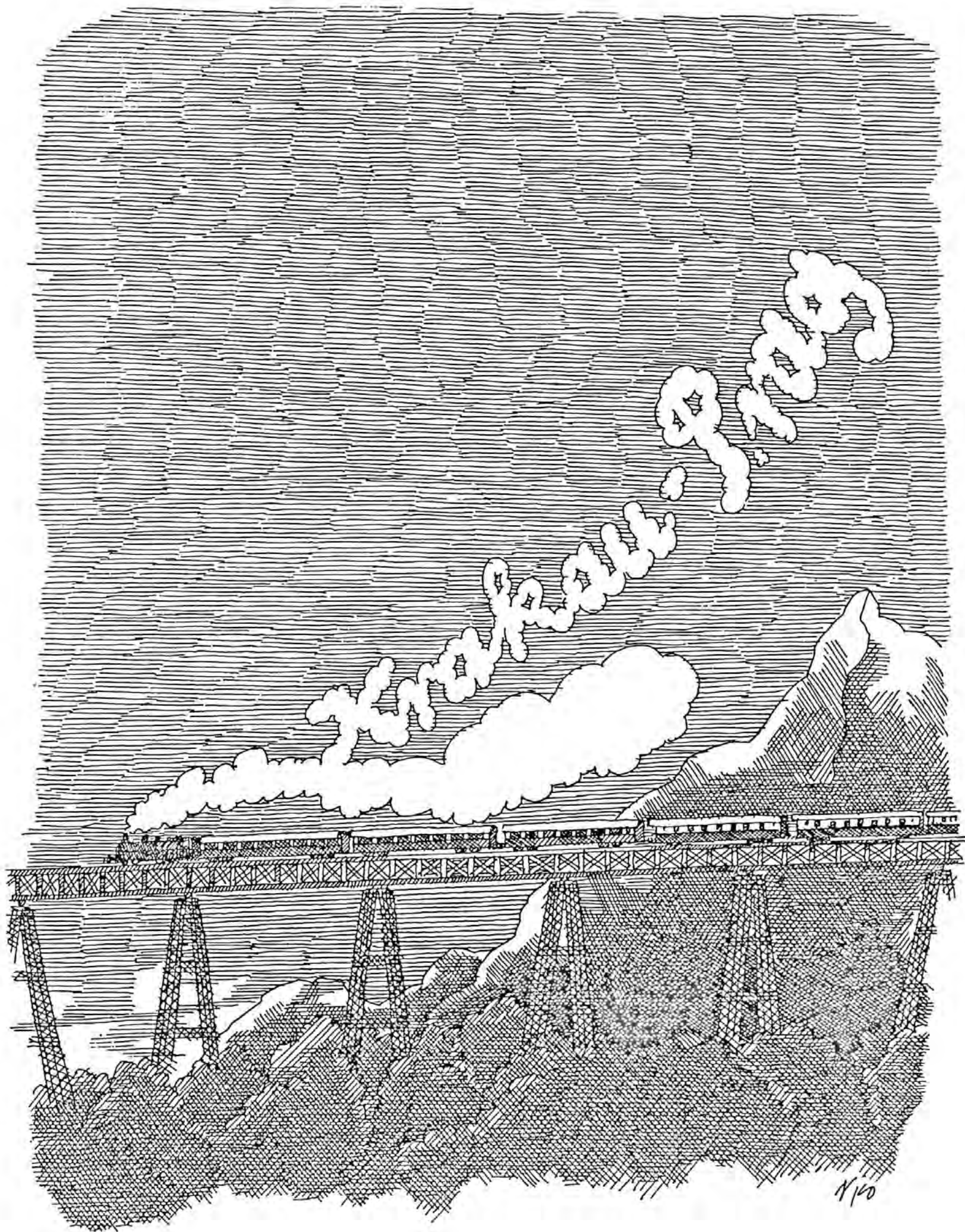
time, a sense of "Europe" had never been more strongly felt than in the coffee-houses of pre-1914 Austria, where one went "to be alone without feeling alone" (Otto Friedländer), and "had time to contemplate the experience that those outside were missing" (Anton Kuh).

Most of the names in the list of railway stations – over 70 pages of small print in the Austrian timetable – stood not only for a station but also for one or more coffee-houses. "Coffee-houses", as the 1910 edition for Austria of *Baedeker's Handbook for Travellers* notes in a separate entry, "are found all over in cities and spas. It is customary to take a first breakfast between 8 and 10 o'clock. One goes visiting mainly in the afternoon and in the late hours of the evening. A large selection of newspapers, including all the Viennese papers, can be found everywhere, as well as a few German newspapers. When one has finished drinking coffee, one is usually given two glasses of water, over which one can take one's time reading the papers."

This has not really changed in Vienna, or in Cracow, Prague, Plzen/Pilsen, Szeged, Arad, Oradea, Zagreb and Maribor. Only the names of the newspapers have changed, becoming more provincial. In contrast to the "popular superficiality of history books", Friedrich Torberg felt that "what was truly Austrian about the old Austria" ended not with the close of the First World War but in 1938. For it was then that the *Prager Tagblatt*, the *Czernowitzer Morgenzeitung* and the *Pester Lloyd* ceased to be available in the cafés of Vienna, while the *Presse*, the *Tagblatt* and the *Wiener Journal* disappeared from the coffee-houses of Brno/Brünn, Zagreb and Trieste. With them went an awareness of common interests. A sense of Europe could no longer be felt at the European crossroads of Vienna, Prague and Budapest.

Up to that point, according to Torberg, "Austrians had continued to view the Bohemian spas and the Dalmatian sea resorts, the summer holiday in Hungary and winter sports in Slovakia as part and parcel of their world, just as they remained aware of those parts of the monarchy absorbed by Poland and Romania. Young Viennese actors still looked to Ostrau in Moravia, Ausig and Bielitz for their first engagement."

The frequent mention of railways in the following pages is not accidental. The railways run through this book like a thread, just as they did on those subsequently forgotten maps of a broader Europe prior to 1918 and 1938.



This has little in common with the fashionable wave of nostalgia. The railways symbolize the memory of a "European" culture that was common to Cracow and Budapest, Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad and Hermannstadt/Sibiu. This renaissance of values long since declared defunct started to become a unique and not insubstantial political force during the era of "real socialism". At the beginning of September 1991, after the collapse of communism in the former Soviet empire, a Ukrainian intellectual commented that as far as he was concerned, the revolution in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic had started some years earlier in Lvov, formerly Lemberg, when *Die Fledermaus* and *The Student Prince* were performed again at the local theatre for the first time in many years.

In this respect, the railways are identical with the means of communication that had enabled this common Central European culture to develop in the first place, the culture that, during the fall of Communism between 1989 and 1991, meant a "return to Europe" for the peoples concerned. On no account were they "pining for the Habsburgs in the Kapuzinergruft" [their burial place in the Capuchin Church], as certain Viennese commentators falsely assumed.

The railways define the age

In Central Europe, the "European era" coincides with the "age of the railway". Europe entered the provincial towns of eastern Galicia and Bukovina with the advent of a regular rail service to Cracow and Prague, the oldest university cities north of the Alps. Vienna, in turn, only became a cultural and scientific melting pot because the railways and the industrialization that accompanied them attracted multitudes of people from the Habsburg provinces.

The Habsburg empire was an empire of contradictions (and eventually collapsed because it could not reconcile them) and lacked harmony on account of its variety of languages, national cultures and stages of economic development. Notwithstanding these differences, all parts of the empire used the same system of measurements. Cast-iron plaques announced the altitude of each railway station, and milestones along the railway lines showed the distance from Vienna (a practice still maintained in most of the successor states).

The railways defined the age. All other characteristic institutions of the time depended upon them, including the post office, which operated the first regular cashless system of payments in Europe (we shall say more about the *Postsparcassa* below) and the newspaper culture of the coffee-houses.

With its freight of European culture, the railway also brought civilization to the underdeveloped regions in the East of the empire. In this respect it had a forerunner in the shipping which plied the Danube. Elias Canetti describes how in Ruse, the Bulgarian town on the Romanian border in which he was born, the "international", i.e. Viennese, newspapers brought the "outside world" to a growing number of the increasingly inquisitive middle class, and how eagerly people awaited the arrival of the Danube mail-boat. People even held earnest discussions on local news which in Vienna only interested the suburb concerned – simply because it was in the newspaper.

In recent decades, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) assumed the former role of the Viennese newspapers in some central European states, which kept a knowledge of German alive in these areas. Friends in Czechoslovakia have often expressed their regret to me that they are no longer kept informed about what is happening in Vienna, because people have taken to listening to the local Czech or Slovak stations since they have ceased to function as propaganda mouthpieces.

At the insistence of its former communist rulers, Sarajevo – the city in which the shots were fired that led to the demise of Austria-Hungary – was chosen as the venue for the Winter Olympics, and thus also received an exorbitantly expensive infrastructure financed with international loans. Most of this had fallen into disrepair even before the civil war. Like so many communist showpieces, the dream of a Bosnian winter sports region that put Austria and Switzerland in the shade came to nothing. However, in 1991 – the year in which the local communists lost power – there was talk of restoring the Bosnian narrow-gauge railway network, which had been steadily run down ever since the Second World War.

Construction of the Bosnia-Herzegovinian Provincial Railway began shortly after Austria-Hungary annexed this Ottoman territory in 1878. Because of the mountainous terrain, the lines to Sarajevo and the Dalmatian coastal town of Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik) used a special "Bosnian gauge"

of 760 millimetres. From Brod in Slavonia the train even conveyed restaurant cars and sleepers (in which the beds were arranged parallel to the rails because of the narrow carriages). Although military considerations played a major part in the construction of the railways, the dainty steam locomotives from Vienna Neustadt and Floridsdorf also brought "Europe" into the mountains of Bosnia.

In his novel *Die Strudlhofstiege*, Heimito von Doderer portrays Stangler, the builder of the Bosnian Railway and now an old man in his country house at Semmering, as a successful representative of the iron principles of his "European" age, whereas his son and daughter, who question their own existence and their times, embody the desperate, unhappy successors.



Returning home to Europe

17

After more than four decades of living in a divided Europe, westerners have forgotten many of the things about Europe that earlier generations accepted as a matter of course.

That was never the case in eastern Europe. The awareness of belonging to Europe, its history and traditions was an inherent part of the intellectual struggle for survival all nations behind the so-called Iron Curtain engaged in. Just as the Poles regarded themselves as "the saviours of the West" because King John III Sobieski's victory at the Battle of Kahlenberg (1683) broke the Turkish siege of Vienna, the Czechs revered Prague as "the mother of cities" in mediaeval Europe and seat of the oldest university north of the Alps, while the Romanians liked to point to their Latin origins and the Hungarians saw the crown of St. Stephen as evidence that this originally Asiatic nomadic people had become European at an early date. But all of these nations were conscious of living in – and wanted to remain part of – the centre, not the East, of Europe. The Slovenes and Croats desired independence not because they were particularly chauvinistic, but because in terms of their social traditions and history the experimental construction of a south Slavic state ("yugo" means south), irrespective of political form – from Greater Serbian royal dictatorship to Titoist Communism – involved "balkanizing" regions shaped by centuries of Venetian and Viennese culture.

In the decades between 1968 and the collapse of Communism at the end of the 1980s, the term *Mittleuropa* ("Central Europe") was instilled with a specific meaning from the Dalmatian coast to Cracow. In the words of a participant at a meeting of Central European writers organized by the Hungarian poet György Konrád in the 1980s: "The East does not begin at the Bohemian Forest or in Bruck on the Leitha River; wherever you see the imperial yellow of Schönbrunn Castle is still the West."

As the colour of most official buildings of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, imperial yellow, symbol of a shared culture, came to symbolize a "homesickness" – not for the former Habsburg monarchy, but for its Europeanism. Homesick for the larger whole, homesick for Europe.

By designating the October Revolution of November 1917 as the starting point of history, the communists had tried to rob the nations of Central Europe of their own history. History proved to be stronger. The awareness of

“having once not been part of the East” was a powerful force driving any sort of resistance.

The “return to Europe” that Václav Havel proclaimed in Wenceslas Square in Prague at the climax of the “Velvet Revolution” in 1989 was also a return to the region’s historical roots – not so much to Austria and the Habsburgs or to the Bohemia of Charles IV, but to the First Republic under Masaryk, which had propelled Bohemia and Moravia to technological and economic leadership not only of Europe, but of the world.

Bismarck had grasped the region’s significance: “Whoever rules Bohemia rules Europe.” We, on the other hand, had forgotten that Prague lies one hundred kilometres west of, and closer to, Zurich than Vienna.

Imperial Yellow

In the long and often tedious years I spent commuting as a journalist between the eastern and western halves of Europe, I travelled by train whenever I could, even though it was a more protracted, laborious and arduous business than travel by car or aeroplane. The worn and shabby upholstered seats in the "first class" carriages of eastern European railways were seldom up to the standard of second class in the West.

It is probably thanks to these railway journeys that for me "Europe" conjures up far more colourful and lively images than functional Brussels office blocks: images such as the green expanse of the southern Bohemian lake district or the endless red poppy fields between Budapest and Hegyeshalom.

Vienna is at a point of geographic transition. Travelling from the last alpine foothills of the Vienna Woods northwestwards into the harsh climate of the Waldviertel and the mountains of Bohemia and Moravia is very different from heading in an easterly and southerly direction into the more diffuse, southerly, lighter climate of Pannonia or Croatia. Yet, despite the very different colour impressions, they share certain elements, for the most part splashes of yellow: the passing buildings of former estates long since converted into the machinery depots for agricultural collectives, run-down country seats, here and there an official building or post office, a railway station built to a standardized design, a station buffet, and a once handsome Vienna-Jugendstil boulevard running from the station into town.

Whether in Polish or Ukrainian Galicia between Przemyśl and Chernovtsy/Czernowitz, in Novi Beograd (formerly Semlin) on the left bank of the Save or in the harbour district of Trieste – and even though the architecture in such places is much less grandiose than the structures it emulated (Fischer von Erlach's Schönbrunn, or the nouveau-riche bombast of Vienna's Ringstrasse, for example) – the dominant imperial yellow of the buildings bears lasting testimony to the shared history and the mutual embodiment of a link between the periphery and the centre.

Communist maxims emblazoned in gold on the red banners sporadically draped across facades – such as that displayed on the "public security" building in Karlovy Vary (formerly Karlsbad) in western Bohemia to mark the anniversary of the October Revolution – did not alter this. There, from a niche under the message "With the Soviet Union for ever" peered the head of

a Nepomuk statue. This Jesuit symbol of the Habsburg Counter-Reformation was supposed to banish from the minds of the ordinary people of Bohemia Jan Hus and his saying – which Masaryk later adopted – that truth will triumph in the end. “‘Nepomuk after Nepomuk spitting from every bridge.’ – Rilke perhaps?” a little old man murmured surreptitiously as he slouched by. I had not realized that these were indeed the words of the Prague poet who, more than any of his contemporaries, was not a German or an Austrian or a Czech, but a European writer.

In the years of separation following two world wars, the imperial yellow of Schönbrunn remained the common element, just as German (not English) was the lingua franca of train travellers on the *Vindobona* from Vienna to Prague and the *Orient Express* – of which only the name bears any resemblance to the luxury train of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons Lits et des Grands Express Européens – between Budapest and Bucharest.

Often enough the lost world of Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka, Franz Werfel, Max Brod, Robert Musil, Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth also dominated the conversation. The train had become a substitute for the lost institution of the coffee-house with its “bourgeois-decadent” literati and international newspapers. As politics was not an appropriate topic of conversation among travellers at that time, one resorted to historical comparisons. Train conversations between Vienna, Ostrava (Mährisch-Ostrau), Budapest, Győr (Raab), Zagreb (Agram) and Ljubljana (Laibach) still fuel my understanding of modern Czech, Hungarian, Slovenian and Croatian writers. Whether György Konrád, Milan Kundera, Bohumil Hrabal or Gerhard Roth (an Austrian whose novels are set in Slovenian-Styrian surroundings), Nepomuks spit their Schönbrunn yellow patches into the poppies and carp-filled ponds of the passing landscape.

In the “Mitropa” restaurant car of the Deutsche Reichsbahn (East German Railways) we dubbed the old Franz-Josephs-Bahn from Vienna to Prague via Gmünd, Veselí and Tábor the “Central European axis”. One of my two travel companions in the express from Berlin-Lichtenberg to Vienna came from Dresden and was on the way to his first concert in the “West”. The other came from Moravia and had spent three and a half days in Prague gathering all the permits, visas and stamps he needed – assuming he made his tight

connection in Vienna – to address a conference in Meran, where his grandparents had, as a matter of course, spent a night in the “Grandhotel Palace” on their honeymoon before the First World War. He set great store by the meeting, hoping it would open the door for him to the western state-of-the-art in his field of science.

Not a uniform blue with gold stars

We did not speak about the EC or the EEA or the joint norms issued by Brussels. Our Europe was a bright patchwork, not a uniform blue with gold stars. The stars we saw from the train window rusting on factory roofs were still red. They were also suspect, as they embodied ideologies, whereas we sought shared features beyond the confines of ideology.

The common elements were yellow, architectural features in “Schönbrunn yellow”. It occurred to us that the only star which had served as a link between Vienna, Prague and Berlin – and later between the successor states to Austria-Hungary and the better qualities of the Weimar republic – was the Star of David. The Europeans of this region, particularly in the years when the Europe of Stefan Zweig’s “World of Yesterday” was being torn apart, were those whom nationalists scornfully called “cosmopolitans”: the Jews of Central Europe.

“In the sweet shops that stood across the road from almost every Vienna theatre,” wrote Friedrich Torberg, “one could buy a box of sweets specially packed for the theatre. It contained four different kinds of sweet and was called ‘A Fine Theatre Mixture’. – My father’s family came from Bohemia, my mother’s from Hungary, and my birth certificate from the Jewish community of Vienna. I am a fine monarchy mixture.”

Today one would say: a Central European.

The tracks of the Franz-Josephs-Bahn between Vienna and Prague (known among railway workers as the “Jessas-Maria-und-Joseph-Bahn” [Jessas-Maria is an Austrian oath] on account of its dilapidated superstructure) were also acquainted with the Star of David. This line, like the inter-ethnic Kaiser-Ferdinand-Nordbahn and the Austrian North-Western, carried cattle-cars stuffed with people northwards to extermination in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Imperial yellow had never been more than painted plaster. But a great deal went on behind it. The difference between central and western Europe was the fact that the Habsburg plaster lasted longer than most of what it concealed: the yellow wash survived.

This "Europe" that first emerged in the age of the Baroque is, in the final analysis, still in thrall to Baroque illusion – even though its roots go back far further, back to the ancient Slavs of Greater Moravia, the Magyars from the Far East, the Teutons and ancient Bavarians, to Swabia, Lorraine, Spain and Flanders, and to the Holy Roman-German/Czech legacy of Charles IV.

The plaster was meant to last forever

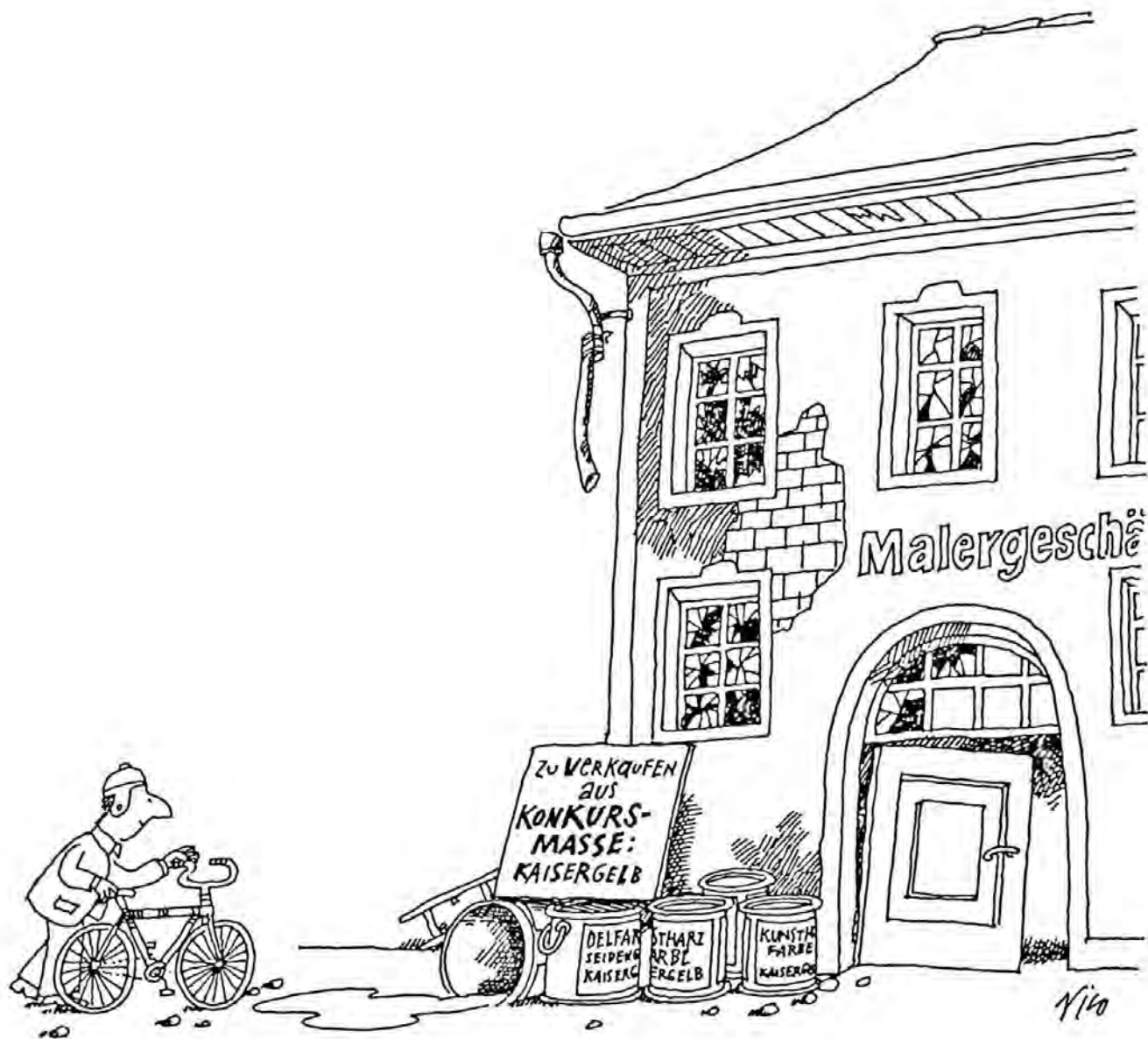
The walls were often enough provisional (and therefore not insurmountable); but the plaster was meant to last forever.

"Indeed, had the Austrian empire not existed all this time, it would, for the sake of Europe, for the sake of humanity itself, have to be created quickly!" wrote František Palacký (1798-1876), a Bohemian national historiographer and political harbinger of the Czech nation, in 1866.

Austria-Hungary, "the empire in the middle", was wrecked by the disparate forces that tore Europe apart.

Imperial yellow, which outlasted everything, was not an invention of the emperor. And Palacký, precursor of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovak state, loved the empire not because of the emperor but because of its role in Europe. Palacký prophesied the division of Europe were the Austro-Hungarian empire to fail. His support for the empire was purely pragmatic.

Like everything that has survived of Habsburg Austria, imperial yellow is the work of pragmatists. Maria Theresa and Fischer von Erlach originally had Schönbrunn painted pink – which borders on bad taste to modern eyes. The original colour was discovered by experts of the Austrian Office of Historical Monuments during renovation work. Puritanical art historians almost convinced the Office to paint the imperial palace pink again. Would that not have once again severed the link between Vienna and Prague, Kaschau, Szeged, Klausenburg, Zagreb, Lvov, Cracow and Marienbad?



The colour is not an invention of art historians either. The yellow of Schönbrunn was chosen simply because it was the longest-lasting of all facade colours, longer-lasting than white, sky blue or pink, colours far more typical of the Baroque. And it was also for practical reasons that the white stations of the Vienna suburban railway designed by the great modern architect Otto Wagner (1813-1918) were eventually painted imperial yellow in the republican '20s. At the insistence of art historians, they were "renovated" in white only at the end of the 1970s, and since then at ever shorter intervals.

The Habsburg empire collapsed when it lost its sense of pragmatism, and the people of Central Europe turned to other colours. After all these facade renovations people came back to imperial yellow and began to think better of their common culture, as symbolized by the single plan drawn up by the Vienna architects Fellner and Helmer for opera houses throughout Austria-Hungary, the city high schools erected on the occasion of Franz Joseph's golden jubilee – and the railway stations that for seven decades have dreamt of the better and faster trains that used to frequent them.

In *Requiem for Habsburg* the Croatian poet Miroslav Krleža describes the close of 1918 in his birthplace Zagreb as follows: "A few days ago Austria disappeared from our little town so quietly that none of our dear and respected fellow citizens actually noticed that it was no longer among us. Everything was still in its usual place: the Brothers of Mercy Hospital, Wasserthal's hardware shop, Mittelbach's pharmacy, the local branch of the Graz department store Kastner & Öhler, the Grand Hotel, the First Croatian Savings Bank, the Discount Bank, Berger's Bazaar, Kugli's bookshop, Café Korso and the Jägerhorn Restaurant, the gold watches displayed in Bulwan's shop-window, the books at Breyer, the coats at Bettelheim and the photos at Mosinger's. ... The theatre has continued to perform *The Merry Widow*."

It took fascists and communists to empty the imperial-yellow facades of Banus-Jelačić Square of their accustomed life and contents.

With Zagreb's return to Central Europe, Schönbrunn yellow and the caryatids (figure-shaped columns with human faces) bearing their burden of architectural history once again mark an area whose people, despite linguistic differences and dissimilar economic development, have preserved the common values of a shared Central European culture to an astonishing degree.

It is not surprising that Yugoslavia split where the architectural use of imperial yellow ceased: along the centuries-old divide between Latin-Habsburg Central Europe and the Orthodox/Ottoman-influenced Orient.

Today the East again begins where Vienna's influence formerly ended. Imperial yellow has proved to be the most durable colour of all.

The Continent's first railway

The border that divided Europe for a good four decades after 1945 cut across many age-old routes and highways. One of the elements which – quite literally – held the Dual Monarchy together was its far-flung communications network. This included the Danube and its tributaries, which formed the oldest – and for centuries the most important – thoroughfare for people, ideas and goods. Initially, “Central Europe” denoted an economic area in which East-West trade routes intersected with North-South routes such as the amber and salt roads.

It may seem surprising today that the first railway on the European continent was built between Austria and Bohemia. At the time, however, it made perfect economic sense.

Salt has played an important role since the earliest settlements in central Europe. It has given rise both to wars and to economic prosperity. From the early Middle Ages, the salt trade defined transcontinental trade routes and the siting of new settlements.

Salt has been mined in the Austrian Salzkammergut, one of the earliest and most important salt-extraction regions in Europe, since the Hallstatt period (750–500 BC). This area supplied the whole of central Europe, including Germany, with this vital product. From pre-historic times the old salt road crossed the Danube at Linz and ran through the Mühlviertel in Upper Austria to Bohemia. Budweis – now known in Czech as České Budějovice – was an important centre of the salt trade. From here salt carts carried their precious cargo northwards.

The poor condition of roads in the Middle Ages was always a challenge to inventive minds. For centuries, though, shipping was the preferred means of transport. It was relatively easy, from a technical point of view, to link the Salzkammergut with the Danube by making the River Traun navigable. The Vlatava/Moldau, which rises in the Bohemian Forest and flows through Prague and into the Elbe, was also an ideal waterway. On the other hand, the continental watershed between Budweis and the Danube remained a crucial barrier. Plans were repeatedly drawn up to connect them through a system of canals.

One of them was actually realized in the 18th century: the Schwarzenberg Canal, remnants of which still survive in the Czech Republic and Austria. It

was used to transport firewood from the forests of Prince Schwarzenberg in the Bohemian Forest across to the Greater Mühl Valley to the Danube and thence to Vienna.

Plans to build canals navigable by ship never materialized because of the technical difficulties involved.

Even at the beginning of the 19th century it was generally accepted that water was the only viable means of transporting salt and the products of the rapidly growing Bohemian manufacturers. The "Hydrotechnical Company", founded to commission a project for water transport, chose Franz Joseph Ritter von Gerstner, a gifted technician and founder of the "Bohemian Corporative Technical Academy" (forerunner of the Prague Technical University) to draw up a plan.

At its 1808 General Meeting in Prague, the company, expecting a project for a canal, was amazed when Gerstner presented detailed plans for a wood-and-iron railway to link the Vlatava/Moldau and the Danube. Gerstner had heard about experiments in England using engines with flanged wheels running on rails similar to those used for colliery wagonways. Although he had not seen them, he combined a knowledge of what he had read with his own inventiveness.

Only in 1820, however, did the project assume concrete form: in that year the Viennese Royal Commission on Commerce commissioned Gerstner's son, Franz Anton, a lecturer at the Vienna Polytechnical Institute, to reactivate his father's plans. Four years later, Emperor Franz I granted the younger Gerstner a charter to build the first railway in the Habsburg empire.

In keeping with the spirit of the age, the "imperial and royally chartered" railway company, the first on the Continent, was founded as a private company co-funded by leading industrialists and bankers. The elder Gerstner himself has toyed with the idea of some sort of state railway. For he felt that the new means of transport would have enormous economic potential and thus should be a communal institution that would serve the interests of the nation as a whole and not just generate profits for a few individuals.

Construction began in 1825. Like his father, Franz Anton was farsighted and immediately realized the significance of the first steam engine built by the Englishman George Stephenson. A study trip to England in 1825, the

year the railway line from Stockton to Darlington was opened, strengthened his conviction that the horse-drawn railway favoured by his father was already an anachronism.

Gerstner revised the plans of his railway project to make allowance for this, ensuring that the tolerances of the radii of the curves and gradients would be suitable for locomotives as well. To avoid steep gradients, he designed circuitous inclines which presaged the later alpine railways through the Semmering and Gotthard. British railway pioneers still believed that the only way to haul trains across mountain ranges was by means of water- or steam-powered pulleys. Even Karl Ritter von Ghega, who completed the first transalpine railway from Vienna to Trieste via the Semmering in 1854 (and later built the Hauenstein Railway in Switzerland), had to contend with such conceptions.

The generous scale on which Gerstner designed the project soon led to financial difficulties. A combination of intrigues and growing opposition among a populace frightened by the construction work did the rest. In 1828 the company replaced Gerstner as construction supervisor with Matthias Schönerer, a young, extraordinarily ambitious engineer and pupil of Gerstner's who had successfully intrigued against his teacher behind his back.

Schönerer had a simple formula for lowering costs and speeding up construction, as demanded by the project's financiers: he decided to ignore the possibility of introducing locomotive-hauled trains at a later date and constructed steeper gradients, tighter radii and less robust bridges and embankments.

In 1832 the horse-drawn railway joining Budweis and Linz was opened. The first railway on the European Continent ran 128.8 kilometres from the bank of the Moldau (Vltava) in Budweis (České Budějovice) to the main customs house in Linz. The line was extended to Wels in 1835 and to Gmunden on Lake Traun in 1836 – against the bitter resistance of the Traun shippers, whose livelihood was at stake.

Passenger trains with "2nd and 3rd class carriages"

The volume of freight transported by the railway grew rapidly. Initially, freight was far more important than passengers: the general public restricted their travel to pleasure trips in the immediate environs of Linz and Budweis. Passenger trains running to a regular timetable with "2nd and 3rd class carriages" were only introduced a year after the railway was inaugurated. A form of the "intermodal transport" that has recently come into fashion was practised even then: the carriages of better-class passengers rode "piggy-back" on the safer and more comfortable railway.

It soon became obvious that Franz Anton von Gerstner had been right about building the railway so as to accommodate locomotives and that Schönerer had been extremely short-sighted. By the middle of the century horse-drawn transport could no longer cope with the rapid increase in traffic. Trials using an English-built locomotive proved unsuccessful because of Schönerer's "low-cost" southern incline. Steam power would demand the construction of a new line. In 1872, forty years after it was opened, the Continent's first railway was closed down.

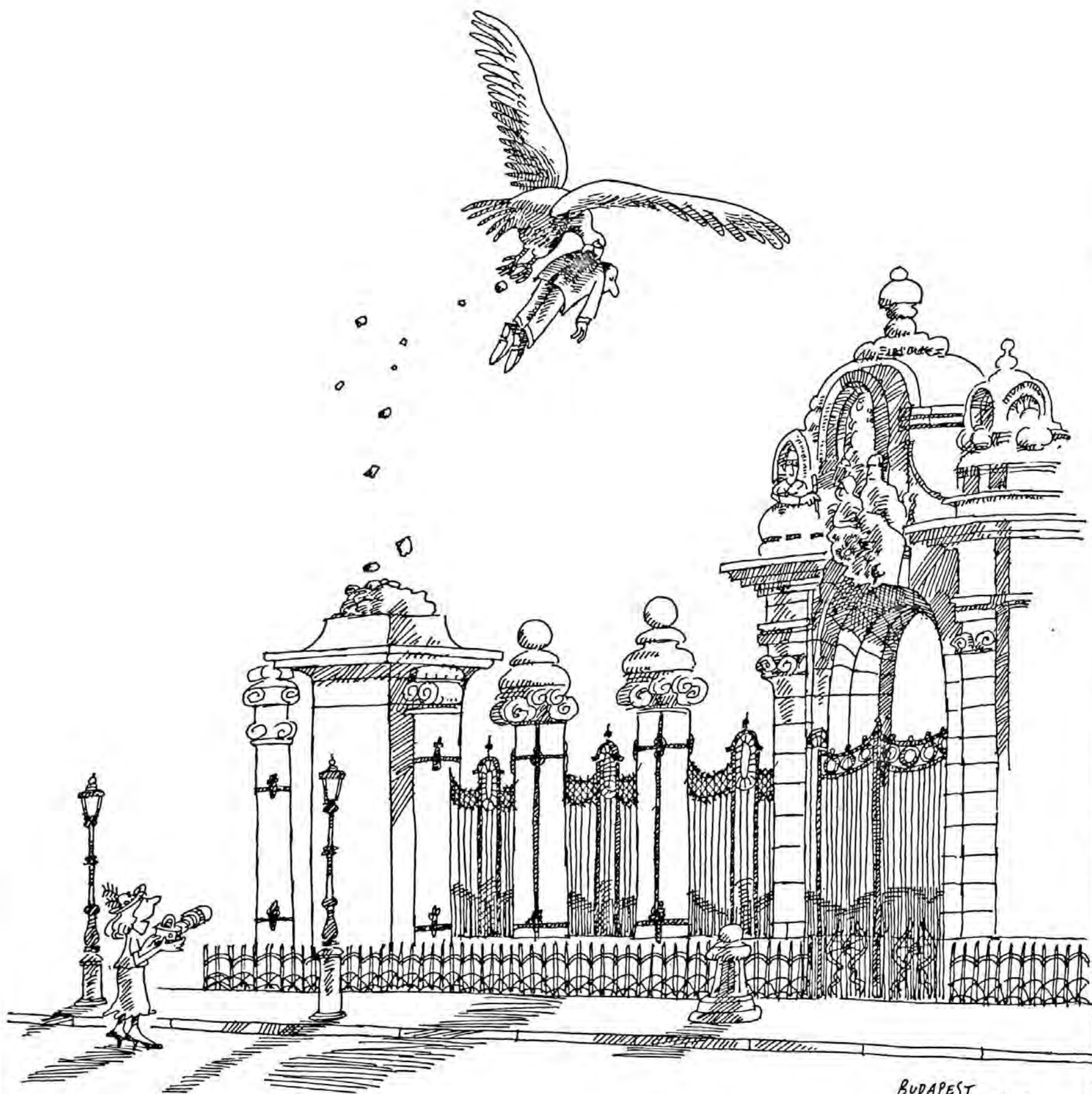
The new means of transport took Europe by storm, unleashing profound economic and social changes. While it made some people rich very quickly by flooding local markets with cheap manufactured products, it ruined the livelihood of large groups of middle-class craftsmen; a lumpenproletariat that vegetated below the subsistence level emerged around the industrial settlements which were mushrooming along the railways.

One of the first European novelists to depict the people condemned to living in these new industrial settlements was the French writer Emile Zola. His Czech father had worked with Gerstner on the Budweis-Linz railway project before emigrating to Paris.

Schönerer's son, by contrast, rejected his father's world – the world of the liberal bourgeoisie and Jewish financiers: he became the leader of Austria's burgeoning antiliberal movement which, at the turn of the century, was espousing German nationalism with jingoistic fervour and calling into question the very foundations of the multi-ethnic Habsburg empire. This movement cleverly exploited the growing resentments of a lower middle class unsettled by the Industrial Revolution's restructuring of society and its values. Georg

Schönerer entered parliament as an ardent admirer of Bismarck and spokesman of the "All German Party".

In this role he became a respected and admired model for a man who was born not far from the terminus of the Budweis-Linz horse-drawn railway, a man who in the next century would smash the unity of the economic and cultural entity that the railway had created: Adolf Hitler.



BUDAPEST
Hauptportal
des Burgpalastes
mit Turul-Vogel
und zwei
Touristen

Gerbeaud, the Communists, Vilmos Tell and dobos cake on the Orient Express

33

Even before the train pulled out of Budapest's Keleti Station, I had realized that the package carefully wrapped in blue-and-white patterned paper must contain something precious. Well after the train had started moving, the elderly lady who sat opposite me in the compartment of the Orient Express from Budapest to Paris checked at least a dozen times that the parcel was securely stowed in the luggage net above her.

Shortly before Győr (Raab) she could no longer contain herself, took down her precious load, put it in her lap and began to untie the string, hesitantly at first and then ever more confidently. Long before the Hungarian customs officers who were slowly approaching compartment by compartment could examine its contents, the wrapping had revealed its secret: spread out opposite me was a piece of dobos cake, poppy-seed croissants, a box of lovingly decorated marzipan and a slab of chocolate wrapped in paper of outdated design.

My astonishment at what was anything but a modest refreshment on the east-west journey must have been written all over my face. At any rate, the lady, who was worried about calories, now appeared to be moved by a bad conscience to offer an explanation. There, in shabby Romanian carriages that made a mockery of the name Orient Express, I heard the name Gerbeaud for the first time.

Dobos cake, poppy-seed croissants, fancy biscuits and chocolate all came from Gerbeaud. Although she had lived in Vienna for over forty years, there was still nothing better for her as a born Hungarian than Gerbeaud. Even such famous names as Dehmel of Vienna, Mayer of Bratislava or Zauner of Bad Ischl could not compare with this confiseur. My travelling companion was an expert in matters of cakes and confectionery: "Gerbeaud is Gerbeaud, even if the name has changed."

Connoisseurs of the cake and pastry purveyors to the imperial and royal court agreed that Gerbeaud was Austria-Hungary's most exclusive confectioner. In 1948 the communists eradicated the name Gerbeaud as the embodiment of capitalist decadence.

However, in a country in which one would soon be permitted to kiss the hands of female comrades once again, care was taken that the recipes for the specialities of the house were not forgotten: the marzipan fruit, the Malakoff

and Esterházy gateaux and in autumn the heavenly chestnut puree. It is said that members of the "new class" working in the ministries close by or in the office of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on the bank of the Danube occasionally took home a small parcel of those fancy biscuits that had once tickled the fancy of ladies of society.

Except that now the wrapping paper bore the name of an author instead of the founding master confectioner and chocolate-maker. The Hungarian national poet Mihály Vörösmarty was more familiar with the art of rhyme than the art of baking; chocolate was a foreign word for him, and in 1855, the year of his death, the site where the Swiss – better: Genevan – Emile Gerbeaud would establish his shop was still a marshy expanse on the edge of the Danube.

It was intended as a particular honour for Vörösmarty that his monument was erected between the Confiserie Gerbeaud and the elegant Váci utca, the most select shopping quarter in Budapest, comparable only to the Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich and the Kärntnerstrasse in Vienna. The fact that his name now graced not only the square (Vörösmarty tér) but also the luxury cake and pastry shop – which, unchanged, was suddenly one of the achievements of real socialism – did not do any damage to his reputation. Gerbeaud could, as happened so often in those days, have been assigned a less worthy successor than a poet who bore no blame for communism. After all, the favourite confectioner of her late majesty, Sissy, queen of Hungary and empress of Austria, had a deep appreciation of all the arts, in particular Friedrich Schiller's plays, which at the time were very popular in Hungary.

As evidence of this, and as a mark of his Swiss origins, Emile Gerbeaud commissioned a detailed silver copy of the William Tell monument in Altdorf from a well-known Budapest goldsmith. He placed it among his cakes and pastries in the shop-window overlooking Vörösmarty tér, in full view of the poet on his pedestal. (In that position the statue survived four decades of Stalinism and Kádárism, until, in the period of reformed communism, it was moved for its own protection to a console in the interior of the shop, where it stood behind sales-counters piled high with cakes.)

Vilmos Tell, the hero of the Swiss liberation struggle, had a special place in the hearts of the Magyars, as Gerbeaud, an astute businessman well knew. It

was not for nothing that episodes from Tell's life have decorated the most popular playing cards in Hungary since 1848, when the revolution of that year was crushed. Tell with his son Walter, the hat on the pole, Tell in a boat on Lake Lucerne, Kuoni the shepherd, Walter Fürst, Ital Reding, the Habsburg governor Gessler in the Hohle Gasse, Harras Rezső and Habsburg Castle in the Canton of Aargau were all depicted on the cards, serving as expressions of subversion against the House of Habsburg, first in Budapest, then throughout Hungary, and later in Bohemia and Moravia as well. Just a few months after the premiere of Schiller's drama about Tell, the piece was being performed in Hungarian in Pécs.

The liberal bourgeoisie in Pest understood the allusion in the master confectioner's shop-window and bit into his tasty butter cream fillings all the more eagerly.

A few years after I met Gerbeaud's admirer in the Orient Express on the way to Vienna, Gerbeaud returned to Budapest. Emile Gerbeaud had long since died, of course. But in 1984, the year of reforms, the communists brought him back. After a great deal of effort, they traced the last surviving descendants of the Swiss émigré and obtained permission to use the original name of the venerable pastry paradise once again. It caused a sensation when, one morning, Budapesters were greeted by CONFISERIE GERBEAUD in gold letters on the freshly renovated facade next to the terminus of the Földölati, the first metro on the European continent, instead of VÖRÖS-MARTY CUKRASZDA. Henceforth, the poet, who bore no responsibility for any of these events, had to make do with the considerably less comfortable pedestal of his monument in the square.

As an elderly regular of the cake and pastry shop confided in me much later, "Once Gerbeaud became Gerbeaud again, I was convinced that communism would not last long". Her favourite place was a chair below the portrait of Emile Gerbeaud, a detail the catering company, even though still state-owned, had not overlooked.

Other capitalists whose names had once also been well-known trade marks – the Dreher brewing family or the Zwack liqueur manufacturers ("Unikum") – had to wait a number of years before they too, like Gerbeaud's cakes, again became household names in Hungary.

When Hungary's role as the vanguard of the "Velvet Revolution" and in the ensuing collapse of Communism in eastern Europe is eventually analysed, the role of dobos cake, nut croissants, marzipan sweetmeats, handmade milk chocolate and a subversive named Vilmos Tell will surely deserve a mention.

When Bratislavans went to the theatre in Vienna by tram

37

As the crow flies, Bratislava – or Pressburg, as it is still called in Austria – is only 50 kilometres from Vienna. Vienna-Schwechat airport lies almost exactly halfway between them. If developments after 1945 had not placed an insurmountable barrier between them, the two cities would by now have formed a continuous urban sprawl along the Danube, like similar cities on the Rhine.

Instead, a dividing line as wide as generations still exists in the minds of the people on both sides years after the opening of the borders. Most Viennese are more familiar with Florence, Venice, Athens, Zurich, Düsseldorf and London than Bratislava.

The only “memory” passed on from grandparents to grandchildren in both Vienna and Bratislava is the recollection that at one time one could “take the tram” from one city to the other.

Pressburgers would take the *Elektrische* (“electrical”) to the theatre in Vienna. The Viennese, in turn, took the *Überlandstrassenbahn* (“overland tramway”) to Pressburg for a morning or lunch-time drink in Walisch’s beer-hall or to taste the new wine at Schmidt-Hansl. The doughnuts and punch gateaux at Mayer’s, the city’s leading cake and pastry shop, were reputed to be better than those of any competitor in Vienna, Budapest or the chic spas of Gastein, Baden, Ischl, Karlsbad (now Karlovy Vary) or Marienbad (now Mariánské Lázně), and a perfect excuse for a Sunday excursion down the Danube. And on special occasions one would take the *Pressburger Bahn* from Vienna for a business dinner in restaurants such as the *König von Ungarn* or the *Grüner Baum*.

After reading his own German translations of excerpts from his work at a March 1990 gathering in the Viennese literature centre *Zur alten Schmiede* featuring him and his fellow poet Anton Hykisch, the Bratislavan author Ján Zambor had to impress upon his audience that he was not a Czech but a Slovakian writer. The Viennese had long been accustomed to applying *Tschechei*, the Nazi term for the Czech part of Czechoslovakia, to Czechoslovakia as a whole, and *die Beemen*, an often derogatory expression meaning “the Bohemians”, to all Czechs and Slovaks regardless. For many years the club “Slovan Bratislava” even had to put up with being referred to as the “Czech team” on Austrian Radio.



WIEN
50 Km

BRATISLAVA
Michaela Tor

Nico

Zambor told his astonished audience that his flat in one of the prefabricated blocks in Petržalka (Engerau), a satellite town of Bratislava, lay only a few hundred metres from the Austrian border, closer to the Stephansdom than Krems or St. Pölten in Lower Austria.

The plot right next to Zambor's "real socialist" residential block had once been the locomotive depot of the Pressburger Bahn. The poet, however, had come by car. He admitted that the trip of just under an hour had been the most exciting of his life. It was Hykisch's "second attempt" to travel from the East to the West. On his first attempt the eighteen-year-old high-school pupil had been arrested, and the trip to Vienna turned into a year-long journey through Czechoslovak prisons from Plzeň to Ostrava.

Now both of them were standing in the city of their dreams and realized that nothing was strange: the imperial yellow of the public buildings was the same as in Bratislava; the waiters in the coffee-houses had the same attitude, and, apart from Vienna's garish neon advertisements, the memory of "better times", "when one could take the tram from Pressburg to Vienna", didn't bother anybody here either.

Today, Line S 7 of the Vienna suburban railway system (S-Bahn) ends at Wolfsthal in Lower Austria, five kilometres from the Austrian border. Though smothered with bushes, the trackbed of the rest of the line linking the two cities, is still clearly visible running parallel to federal highway no. 9. A solitary signal mast stands rusting not far from the Austrian customs post at Berg. Until a few years ago, a couple of the tramway's overhead power masts, their cables torn and limp, still stood behind the Czechoslovakian customs post at Petržalka.

All attempts to extend the Pressburger Bahn back to its original destination, or at least to link the Vienna S-Bahn (and the airport line S 7) at Petržalka with the terminus of the planned Bratislava metro have been frustrated by the opposition of one property owner on the Austrian side of the border. For decades, until just weeks before the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia, the trackbed had been owned by Austrian Federal Railways. At that point it sold the property to a person with political influence, who clearly hoped that the "noise" of passing trains would never again disturb the peace of his weekend retreat.

In the case of the Pressburger Bahn it is doubly amazing that the legend of the tram that "one could take to the theatre in Vienna" has remained alive so long, despite the vicissitudes of history:

The line was opened in the spring of 1914, a few years before the end of the Dual Monarchy. The entire 69 kilometre route from Wien Grossmarkthalle ("Vienna Main Market") to Pozsony Koronázási-domptér ("Pressburg Coronation Hill Square") was in full operation for just a few weeks.

At the time, Pozsony was the city's official Hungarian name. Like the rest of Slovakia, it was part of "Upper Hungary" and thus belonged to the "trans-leithanic half of the empire", in other words, to the kingdom of Hungary. From 1526 to 1784 Bratislava was both capital of Hungary and the city in which its kings were crowned.

Coronation Hill, from which the terminus of the Pressburger Bahn took its name, was a mound made of the earth brought hither from each of the counties of Hungary for Maria Theresa's coronation as queen of Hungary.

Behind it stands the imperial-yellow building of the Pressburg Civic Theatre, whose architecture stamps it immediately as a work of the Viennese theatre architects Fellner and Helmer.

Vienna Main Market, the other terminus, lay in the Vienna district of Landstrasse (where, according to the locals, the "Balkans" begin), until it was demolished a few years ago to make way for a large office and department store complex. Today, the trains of line S 7 start and end at Vienna's North Station on the Praterstern.

The present-day services are operated by ordinary trains rather than trams. The old Pressburger Bahn had a direct connection with the tram networks of the cities at either end. Tram locomotives took charge of the "inter-city express trains" at the city limits at either side.

In between, on the overland stretch from Gross-Schwechat to Engerau, the "Pressburg Tramway" operated as a normal railway. At the time of its inauguration it was one of the pioneers of electric-powered railways. It was one of the very first transport systems in Europe to be powered by 15 kilovolts at $16\frac{2}{3}$ cycles single-phase alternating current, power supply that later became standard in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Norway.

The 1914-built locomotives with their characteristic side-mounted driving shafts ran for over sixty years on the regular line. The various abbreviations and national symbols they carried over the years reflected political changes in the railway administration. In 1921 the Niederösterreichische Landesbahnen (Lower Austrian Provincial Railways) were superseded by the BBÖ, the national railways of the first Austrian republic. From 1938, the locomotives sported the eagle-and-swastika crest of the Deutsche Reichsbahn (the German national railway company). This was succeeded by a "T" in 1945, symbolizing that they were part of the Soviet occupation forces' spoils of war. From 1955 onwards the veteran locomotives ran another twenty years with the emblem of the Austrian Federal Railways (Österreichische Bundesbahnen – ÖBB).

The original passenger coaches of the Pressburger Bahn were built of high-quality teak and jacaranda to a design by Otto Wagner (1841-1918), the Vienna town planner who had a greater influence than any other person on the subsequent development of architecture in – and far beyond – the borders of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy's successor states. His students in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia in the inter-war period could hold their own with the best architects of the age – with Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and the Bauhaus masters. Wagner, in fact, was the pioneer of modern architecture in Austria.

The First World War soon put an end to the pastime of "promenading" by tram. In the years after 1918, political confusion in the successor states more than once interrupted long-distance train travel: Pozsony/Pressburg was incorporated into Masaryk's first Czechoslovak republic as Bratislava; Béla Kun's communist "soviets" ruled in Hungary, and Austria was "what was left". Slovaks continued to skirmish with Hungarian militiamen over the drawing of the border along the right bank of the Danube, including the Pressburg suburb of Engerau (Petržalka), where the terminus of the railway was situated.

Soon the eight daily trains conveyed only two through coaches in each direction between Vienna's Landstrasse station and the terminus at the Savoy Hotel in Bratislava. From autumn 1935 onwards, passengers had to alight at the frontier at Berg, pass through increasingly strict customs

controls on foot and take the ordinary Bratislavan trams on the Slovak side of the border.

The Deutsche Reichsbahn introduced further changes. After the prelate Joseph Tiso proclaimed an "independent Slovakia" under Hitler's protection, the right bank of the Danube at Engerau was incorporated into the German Reich and became the site of a major German armaments complex. The route of the Pressburger Bahn was changed to terminate at Kittsee station on the edge of the industrial complex. Henceforth it transported far more goods than theatre-goers or travellers out for a Sunday in the countryside. Even during the war, however, the nightly "theatre trains" continued to take Hainburg and Pressburg residents who had attended performances at the Vienna theatres as far as the frontier station at Berg, where they could catch a "road-vehicle service" provided by the Deutsche Reichsbahn to the capital of the Slovak vassal state.

The last great wave of culturally interested passengers rode the Pressburger Bahn in the 1930s – in the opposite direction. When the Interior Minister (a Catholic conservative named Brandl) caved in to rampaging mobs of pro-German sympathizers in 1930 and banned the anti-war film based on Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* in Austria, a member of the socialist youth, Bruno Kreisky, arranged for the Pressburger Bahn to run dozens of special trains to Bratislava.

Whereas the Teutonic cross of the Austrian fascists under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg and the swastika of the illegal National Socialists already signalled the end of democracy in Austria, Czechoslovakia remained an oasis of freedom for a few more years. In both 1934, when parliamentary democracy was abolished in Austria, and 1938, after the *Anschluss*, many fled into exile on the Pressburger Bahn to avoid persecution.

In 1990, there was an unexpected repetition of the *All Quiet on the Western Front* incident. In his will, the Austrian playwright Thomas Bernhard forbade the staging of his plays in Austria. As a result, that year's Vienna Festival moved to Bratislava – the neighbouring country had recently regained its freedom. This time, however, the audiences did not use the electric tramway to get to Fellner & Helmer's Civic Theatre on Coronation Hill Square (which had been through three name changes in the meantime): ordinary,

prosaic buses that were not designed by Otto Wagner rolled through the stretch of "no man's land", which had just been cleared of barbed wire.

Jáchymov, the dollar, Madame Curie and the Soviet atom bomb

45

In years past a favourite subject of conversation for passengers travelling between Vienna and Prague or Vienna and Budapest has been ticket prices and exchange rates. Depending on where one changed one's money or bought one's ticket – in Vienna for the entire journey, or from the conductor on the train for the Czech or Hungarian leg – one could save up to two-thirds of the price. I could never understand the differences in rates for holders of tourist, business, permanent or temporary visas, for cash, cheque or credit card, for the mandatory minimum amount of local currency or with a "bonus" for sums in excess of this. The intricacies of real socialist finance remained as incomprehensible to me as Marx's *Das Kapital*, which I never finished.

But one thing was clear: in the allegedly classless society of "real socialism", there were two very distinct classes: people with foreign exchange and people without.

It was a kind of apartheid that determined whether one got a taxi in Warsaw, gained admittance to a wine-bar in Prague or could buy a specific brand of cigarettes in the hotel in Bucharest – not to mention far more intimate things that hard currency bought some westerners in the East.

For the citizens of these countries, who worked just as hard for their money as people in the West, anything to do with money was in effect a permanent insult – yet simultaneously daily evidence of the superiority of capitalism's free-market system, and far more telling than any western propaganda. At a time when he was still chairman of the Titoist Federation of Yugoslav Communists in Slovenia, Milan Kučan, now president of the independent republic of Slovenia, explained to me that any form of socialism that only managed to achieve an equitable redistribution of poverty was an absurdity and ready for extinction.

The Romans said that money did not stink. But like every human invention, it has its own tradition. No one knew that better than the Czechs. Ever since the decline of the Habsburg empire, they had been accustomed to a stable currency. In the inter-war period the Czech crown was one of the hardest currencies in Europe, backed as it was by gold, which Hitler's Germany subsequently carried off. The banks of Bohemia and Moravia enjoyed an excellent reputation and were hardly affected by the type of

speculation that helped ruin the economy of the first republic in neighbouring Austria.

Bohemia has always been a trading country. In the early Middle Ages Prague was the most important city north of the Alps. Charles IV supervised the systematic expansion of the city. The prosperity of its capital drew businessmen and craftsmen from all corners of the Holy Roman Empire, which at that time embraced more than just Germans.

Bohemian money had a good reputation everywhere. By the 10th century, Kuttenberg – now known as Kutná Hora and still an exquisite Bohemian city second only to Prague – was minting coins from the metal of the plentiful silver mines in the vicinity. In the royal mint founded by Charles IV in the Welscher Hof in Kuttenberg, Florentine minters struck the “Prague groschen”, which was accepted throughout mediaeval Europe on account of its high level of purity.

In later years Kuttenberg had just one competitor: St. Joachimsthal (Jáchymov). Within a few years of receiving its charter as a royal mining town and mint in 1519, this settlement at the foot of the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) was the second largest city in Bohemia. In its boom years, 8000 miners and 800 pit foremen were extracting the silver ore used to mint the sought-after “Joachimsthaler guilder”, a popular coin throughout the Holy Roman Empire. “Joachimsthaler”, in its shortened form of “thaler”, became the monetary unit *per se* of the empire. Even the name of the American currency that centuries later would assume a similar role, the dollar, is derived from (Joachims-) thaler.

Whether the communists knew that when, for want of anything better to do, they decided to use the dollar instead of the transfer rouble as the unit of account for their barter trade?

Jáchymov/Joachimsthal is not only the place of origin of the 20th century's most important currency. At the end of the 19th century a by-product of the silver mining industry, which collapsed when the mines became exhausted shortly after the Thirty Years' War, brought the town new fame: pitchblende.

In the 19th century pitchblende was used to make dyes for colouring the fine porcelain and glassware produced in the nearby town of Karlsbad (now

Karlovy Vary). While visiting the spa in 1896, Antoine Becquerel, a French physicist, discovered that this pitchblende emitted radiation: it was, in other words, radioactive. In Paris, Becquerel's student and assistant, a young Polish chemist by the name of Marie Curie-Sklodowska (1868-1934), began to study this finding. In 1898 she isolated a radioactive element in Joachimsthaler pitchblende which she called polonium after her homeland. Two years later, after combing the former silver mines with her husband, the French physicist Pierre Curie, "Madame Curie" – the term of respect used by the locals – discovered another important element in Jáchymov: radium.

In 1903 Becquerel and the Curies were awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics for their discovery and scientific evaluation of the radioactivity in the Joachimsthal slag heaps. In 1911 Marie Curie won a second Nobel Prize, this time the award for chemistry, for producing pure radium in 1910. Finally, in 1935, Irène Joliot-Curie, who had followed in her parents' footsteps, won the family's third Nobel Prize for her discovery of artificial radioactivity.

The discovery gave St. Joachimsthal a new lease of life as a radioactive spa. At the height of its fame, the "Radium Palace" (later renamed the "Madame Curie-Sklodowska Assembly Rooms") was one of the most renowned and elegant spas in the dying years of the Habsburg monarchy, outshining even chic Karlsbad. Erected in 1910-12, this building in the Vienna Secession style was painted in the customary imperial yellow. After 1948 it was turned into a convalescent home for trade unionists and gradually fell into disrepair. Only from afar does it hint at a golden age when the cream of Europe's society sought the fountain of youth in radioactivity and pleasure in the luxurious concert halls and ballrooms and in the assorted restaurants, bars, beer- and wine-cellars of the Radium Palace, while all around them the cracks in the foundations of the Austro-Hungarian state grew deeper and wider.

Nonetheless, the bureaucrats in the Vienna ministries still had enough insight and flexibility to grasp the potential significance of the new elements. As the 1910 edition of Baedeker's *Austria (excluding Galicia, Dalmatia, Hungary and Bosnia)* remarked, apart from the "Radium Palace", there was also an "imperial and royal laboratory for the manufacture of radium". The readers of the travel guide will have been surprised to learn that it cost 30,000

Austro-Hungarian crowns to extract one gram of this element from uranium pitchblende. The waste left by the production of the silver Joachimsthaler guilders was worth its weight in gold.

Jáchymov also has an epilogue: the name chills the hearts of many Czechs and Slovaks. The generation that lived through the worst excesses of Stalinism does not think of thalers or the radioactive cures of the old Austrian nobility and grand bourgeoisie when they hear it. They associate Jáchymov with the Communist concentration camps of the darkest period of the 1950s. After the Second World War, uranium mining was given special priority as part of the Soviet effort to develop an atom bomb as rapidly as possible. No attention was paid to the health of the people working in the uranium mines: most of them were political prisoners.

A model industrial city, or the "lost son"

For a long time "time is money" meant little in the East. During the Brezhnev decades, when time seemed to stand still, time lost its economic relevance. Technological backwardness – i. e. "not moving with the times" – also contributed to this attitude.

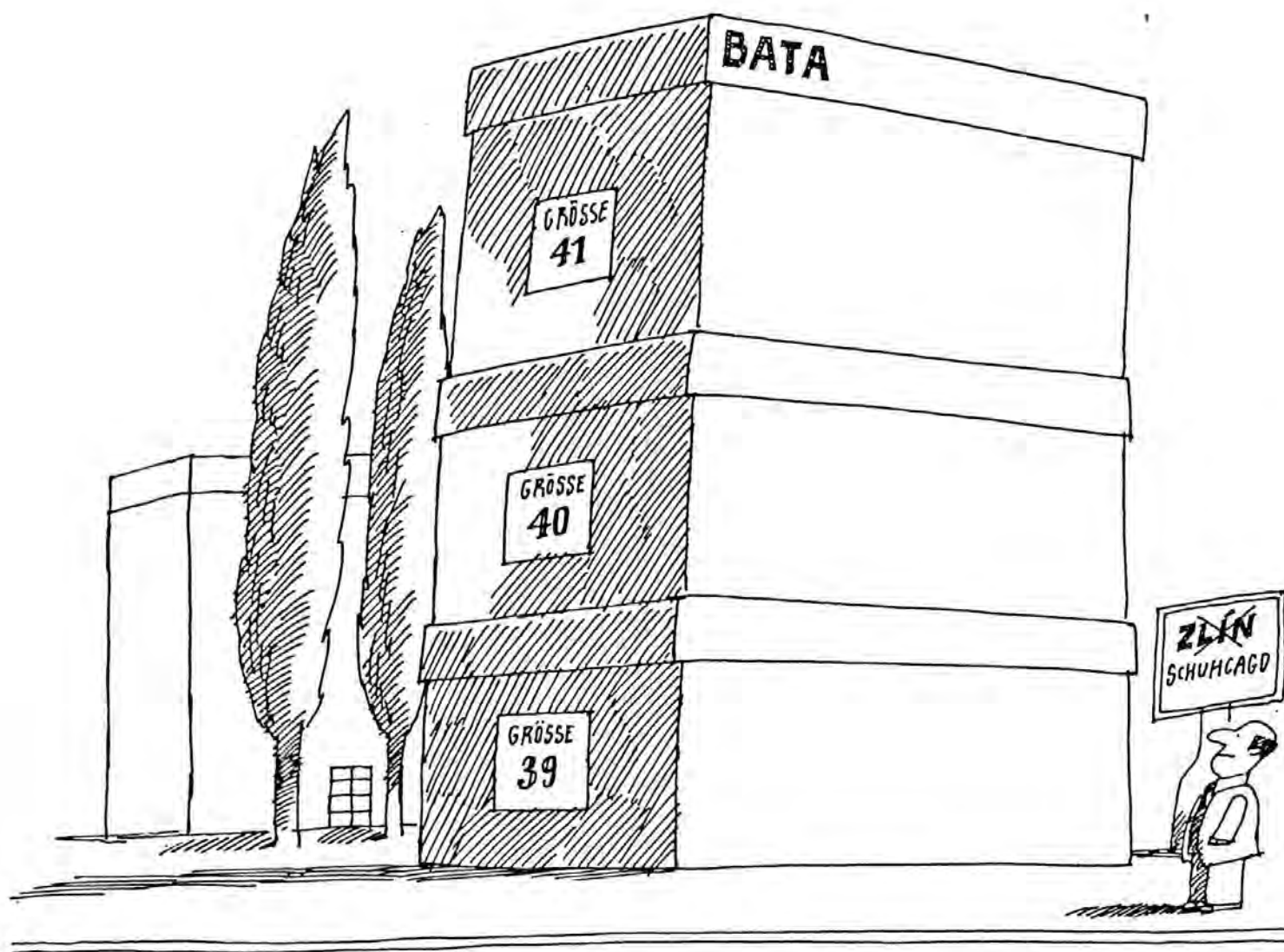
This was particularly devastating for East Germany and Czechoslovakia, two countries that had a strong tradition of industry and craftsmanship and – unlike the predominantly agricultural countries further east – had once been at the cutting edge of technology. Between the wars Czechoslovakia was one of the world's leading industrial states; in the 1930s Bohemia and Moravia had a higher standard of living than Switzerland.

Here people had always "moved with the times". In the interwar period this applied to business leaders as well as the artistic avant-garde, whose work was on a par with that produced in Paris and New York. Important elements of modern architecture were developed in Brno and Prague, and Bohemia's musical traditions enabled it to adapt with ease to 20th-century atonal music as well as to jazz, which gained acceptance in Prague earlier than elsewhere on the European continent.

Tomáš Bat'a, a shoe manufacturer in the small Moravian market town of Zlín, was the embodiment of "moving with the times". He was so annoyed with the train timetables of the Czechoslovakian national railway company (ČSD), most of which were still the seemingly timeless timetables of the old Austro-Hungarian state railways, that he introduced his own trains for employees commuting between Zlín and the capital. Without much ado he took over the minor 25 kilometre Otrokovice-Vizovice branch line that ran through Zlín. The trains he had built for his private line featured a conference room and desks to work at. A good customer of the Czechoslovakian state railways, he finally got permission to run his trains on their tracks as well.

Once his business had grown into a global shoe empire, his "office on wheels" proved inadequate: Tomáš Bat'a and his office took to the air, in aircraft that even had drawing-boards for his draughtsmen.

The company had begun by supplying boots to the Austro-Hungarian army. Antonín Bat'a was a simple rural master shoemaker in the employ of the "exchequer", the state. On the side he sewed house shoes and slippers, which he sold at markets throughout Bohemia and Moravia. His son Tomáš Bat'a,



born in 1876, accompanied him, learning at an early age the close connection between production and markets. The most successful businessman was not the one who charged the lowest prices, but the one who adjusted his wares to the changing desires of customers and produced exactly what the market wanted.

Tomáš Bat'a remained true to his father's principle of always letting market forces control production, even when he had turned the family business into a multinational group. First in Czechoslovakia, then throughout Europe and later in India and the Americas, he built up a network of Bata shoe shops backed up by distribution and marketing operations. Using a largely automated system of communications that was independent of language and anticipated the computers of a later age, all of them reported their daily turnover (with a breakdown of sales by shoe type) to head-office in Zlín. As a result, production could be continuously adjusted to market demand.

Once he dominated the market and had established a virtual shoe monopoly in Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Bat'a created his own competition. He provided low-interest loans for young shoemakers to enable them to exploit market niches. His factories were organized as production collectives that shared in the profits and competed with each other in certain aspects of production.

Tomáš Bat'a began producing shoes on an industrial scale in 1894. The first product was a light linen shoe known as the Batovky. As there was no difficulty in sewing them with existing machines, they could be produced extremely cheaply. The Batovky was the first mass-produced shoe. The knowledge he gained in this process Bat'a applied to the industrial production of leather shoes. Taking a leaf out of Henry Ford's book, he installed the first conveyor belts in Europe.

Because the machines for building conveyor belts were not yet available in Europe, Bat'a made them himself. His automated shoe production was copied by the entire industry. Competitors from all over the world even ordered much of their machinery from Zlín.

The Bat'a company's own needs fuelled its diversification. The search for better and cheaper soles led to a rubber factory that was soon manufacturing everything possible in the field of rubber – from car to aircraft tyres – and the synthetic products that gradually replaced it.

Bat'a had started producing aircraft tyres to meet the demand from his company's own aircraft. The wheels of his Zlín-Prague high-speed railcars were the first to incorporate rubber (Bat'a's example later inspired Michelin in France to produce rubber-tyred rolling stock).

The industrial pioneer's life came to an abrupt end in 1932 when his plane crashed shortly after take-off on a flight to Switzerland, where he was to attend the opening of another foreign subsidiary in Möhlin near Basel.

Although the factory has been closed down, Möhlin is still the distribution centre for Bata shoes in Switzerland. The site is a miniature version of the fully planned industrial city that Zlín became under Bat'a's influence – what was at the time regarded as a pioneering settlement in the American style, and unique in Europe.

Le Corbusier as patron

With one difference: Bat'a had learnt from the mistakes of the Americans. Although the Czechoslovak communists later denounced him as an inhuman (in other words, successful) "capitalist exploiter", even decades later former employees still praised his social practices, adding that only in the communist era did they learn the real meaning of the Marxist concepts of "exploitation" and "alienation". Not only was Bat'a a more socially-minded businessman than the socialists who sought to copy him later, but as an urban developer he was far more humane and modern than all his self-appointed heirs who acted in the name of a new world order. Zlín's rapid growth from a small, insignificant grain market into a major footwear centre and seat of a multinational company followed an overall architectural development model whose concept and masterplan had been drawn up by no less an authority than Le Corbusier himself.

The company had its own architecture and construction office in Zlín. This was run by František L. Gahura, a pupil of Le Corbusier's from Prague, who adopted his teacher's module as the basic unit of all the Bat'a buildings.

Bat'a and his model city of Zlín with its abundance of parks and open spaces helped to make Czechoslovakia a centre of modern architecture. Even today the shoe company's stores of the 1920s and 30s are among the most conspicuous examples of modern architecture in parts of the Czech Republic and Slovakia: they are almost as typical of this period of history as the "Schönbrunn yellow" buildings are of the Habsburg monarchy. It was also a sign of the times when, in December 1989, the Bat'a script – so well known in the West – was switched on again on top of the glass-and-steel building of the "Dům obuvi", a shoe store in the constructivist style on Wenceslas Square, which even to modern eyes still has a futurist look about it.

Bat'a was a pioneer not only in the fields of industry and architecture. Around his factories the dynamic factory owner – who in his youth had experienced life at the bottom of the social pyramid – built schools, training centres and apprentices' hostels for the children of the rural proletariat. This had the two-fold effect of obviating potential labour shortages in the Zlín Valley and of creating opportunities for a social stratum that had previously been given few chances. Some of the country's later business leaders were proud to have attended the "Bat'a school".

The only person who did not honour the place where he had trained was the last all-powerful head of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Miloš Jakeš. On 23 November 1989, during the "Velvet Revolution", he was forced to resign and disappeared from history. As a young man, Jakeš had attended the Bat'a schools in Zlín. After the war, the ambitious functionary helped to promote communism's claim to Bat'a's achievements.

In the years in which it was "building socialism", the Communist Party needed some exemplary achievement with which it could make an impression abroad. For this purpose it chose Bat'a's former industrial metropolis in southern Moravia, the very centre that, before the war, it had denounced as a hotbed of capitalism. Zlín itself was renamed Gottwaldov, after Klement Gottwald (who had never set foot in Zlín before), leader of the Communist Party and first communist president of the socialist republic of Czechoslovakia.

While Tomáš Bat'a's descendants continued to run the company's foreign subsidiaries from Brazil and later Canada in the spirit of the founder, the communists moved into the company's headquarters in Zlín.

One peculiarity was abandoned: Bat'a Sr.'s had had his office at the firm's headquarters installed in a lift. Instead of summoning his employees to him, he used to go by lift from one open-plan office – at the time a novelty in Europe – to the next. By simply removing a partition, he and his desk could become part of the office space he was visiting at the time. Unlike the "capitalist magnate", the communist directors kept their distance from the workers.

The decline of a pioneering achievement

The communists took great pride in showing foreign visitors to Gottwaldov – "the country's first proletarian industrial city" – the communal institutions created by the "exploiter" Bat'a: crèches, canteens, open-air swimming pools, sporting and cultural facilities and neat rows of workers' houses set among trees and parks. In the past four decades most of these have been allowed to go to ruin, like so much else in this one-time model city. In the last decades of socialism, prefabricated apartment blocks and neo-Stalinist gigantism predominated, as elsewhere in eastern Europe. Nothing about these blocks is faintly reminiscent of Le Corbusier's module, for which the dimensions of the human body had been the measure.

One of the first steps the leaders of the revolution undertook in the late autumn of 1989 was to rehabilitate Bat'a – the Bat'a legend. The new government of Prime Minister Marian Čalfa invited Tomáš Bat'a Jr., then over seventy and living in Canada, to return to Czechoslovakia.

Bat'a Jr. arrived in December, in time for the election of Václav Havel as president of Czechoslovakia. He was one of the first returning emigrants to be received on the Hradčany by Havel, who appointed him as one of his advisors. The "lost industrialist's son" from Canada promised the poet-president know-how and investments to help revive the country's hopelessly backward economy. As a sign of his readiness, original Bata shoes reappeared in the "Dům obuvi" store on Wenceslas Square.

Bat'a Jr.'s return to Zlín – no time had been lost in restoring the city's old name – was marked by a triumphant celebration for the son of the firm's

legendary founder. Tens of thousands filled the square in front of the city hall to welcome him: young people with high expectations of a new beginning, and older people with tears in their eyes now that the better times of their memories seemed about to return.

On this occasion Zlín also became the first city in Czechoslovakia to re-erect a statue of the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, which had been stored in a shed at a nearby castle. Václav Havel and Tomáš Bat'a Jnr. unveiled the monument together and renamed "Red Army Street", the thoroughfare leading to the town square, "Tomáš Bat'a Street".

The new government in Prague and Bat'a soon entered negotiations with a view to Bat'a taking an interest in the shoe factory in Zlín, which would henceforth operate as a joint venture under the firm's original name. Both the company's directors and the city council realized that there was no alternative to Bat'a: "Anything else would be a catastrophe for the 90,000 inhabitants of the city", the mayor told me in May 1990; he would do all in his power to win over Bat'a, even give up the office he had just assumed. Months later he did just that, when it was revealed that he had formerly worked as an agent of the state intelligence service StB.

Tomáš Bat'a Jnr. did not take over his father's original business. Negotiations broke down in summer 1991. According to Bat'a's figures, the firm would not be profitable: it was impossible to integrate the former model industrial city into a modern company; its production units were too large to fit into Bat'a's operational strategy; and the disintegration of Comecon, the Eastern Bloc's economic community, had dashed the last chance of mass production for the Soviet Union as a way of bridging the transition period. All that is left of the Bat'a name in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is one small factory near Zlín and about fifty shoe shops.

All through the years in which the communists trampled on the memory of the company founder, many inhabitants of Zlín secretly placed flowers on Tomáš Bat'a Snr.'s grave in the charming woodland cemetery above the city on the anniversary of his death. For these people the Bat'a legend has now been finally buried.

As for Bat'a's former private Otrokovice-Vizovice railway, it had been nationalized in 1948. In summer 1991 the Czechoslovakian state railway company threatened to close the line as part of a large-scale restructuring. The high-speed railcars from Bat'a's time had landed on the scrap heap much earlier: the communist directors had seen no need for desks to work at as their black Tatra limousines swept them to Party meetings in the capital.

What links Zurich with Czernowitz?

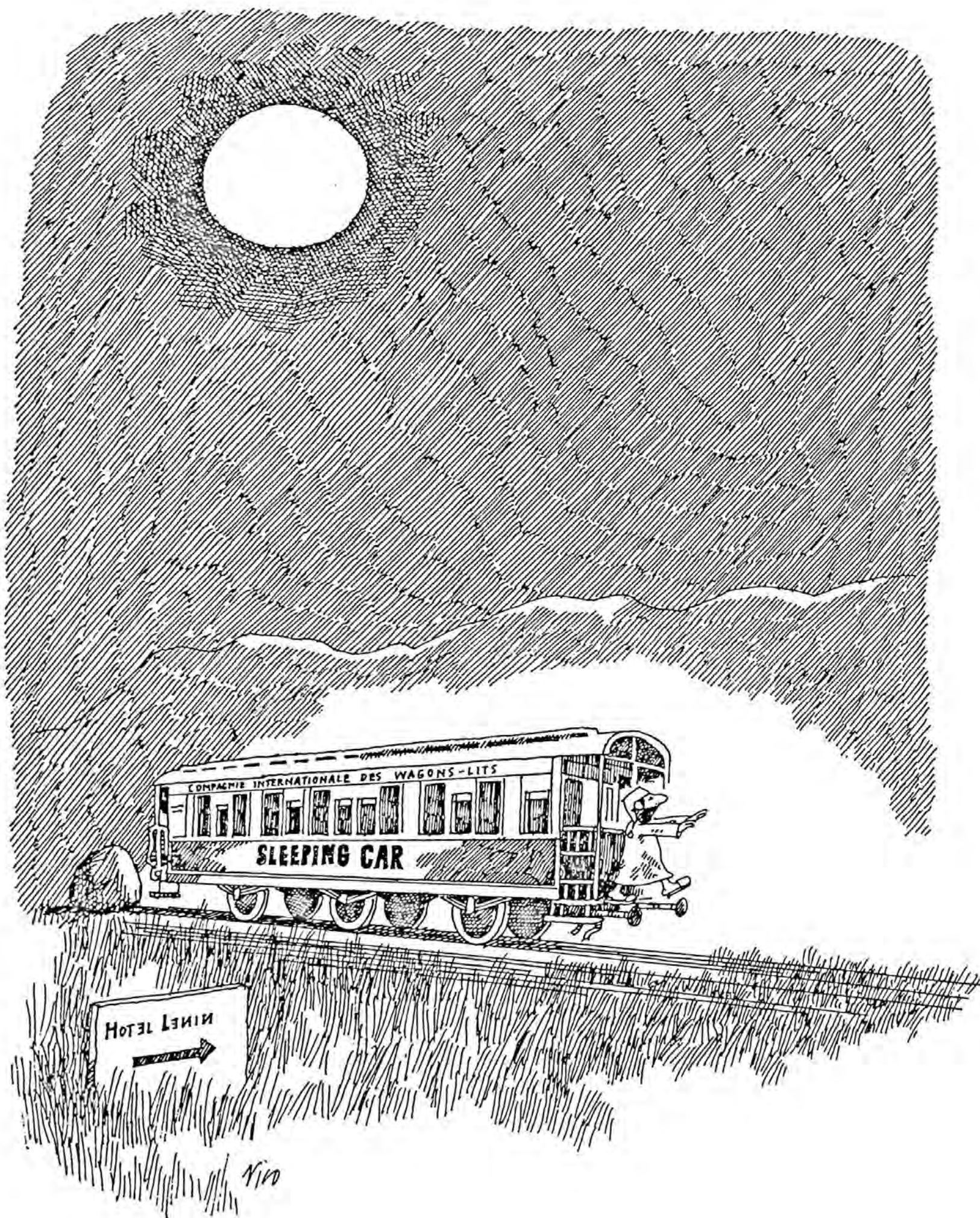
The question draws blank faces in every travel agency. Czernowitz – in Ukrainian Czernovtsy, in Romanian Cernauti – once Austrian, later Romanian and now the chief city of the Ukrainian province of Bukovina, is no longer a popular destination. Even the otherwise well-informed ticket agent at Vienna's South Railway Station confused Czernowitz with Chernobyl, for which no tickets had been sold since the atomic power-station disaster.

According to Table 158 of the official Austrian timetable of 1914, the *K.k. priv. Lemberg-Czernowitz-Jassy Eisenbahn Ges. (im Staatsbetrieb der K.k. Staatsbahnen, Direktion Lemberg)* or "Austro-Hungarian Chartered Lemberg-Czernowitz-Jassy Railway Company (Austro-Hungarian State Railways, Lemberg Office)" operated direct express trains from Czernowitz to Lemberg (Lvov), Cracow, Vienna, Berlin, Jassy (Iasi), Bucharest, Constanta on the Black Sea (timetable footnote: "Steamer connection for Constantinople"), Prague, Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) and Furth im Wald at the Bavarian frontier. At Cracow you would find an immediate connection for Warsaw, at Vienna for Trieste or Venice and at Novosielitsa for Kiev and Odessa.

Daytime trains conveyed restaurant cars of the "Compagnie Internationale des Wagons Lits et des Grands Express Européens". The timetable for the Vienna-Czernowitz night express includes the following footnote: "At Stanislau food trays will be brought to the compartment if ordered in advance from the guard."

Times change. But there is still one thing that links Zurich with Czernowitz. They, and over four dozen other medium-sized European cities, have the same opera house.

At that time Vienna had a virtual monopoly on theatre architecture in the triangular swathe of Europe formed by Hamburg, Zurich and Odessa. The firm of architects Ferdinand Fellner (father and son) & Hermann Helmer designed "off-the-peg" theatre buildings. In Austria-Hungary alone, Fellner & Helmer designed most of the large theatres – thirty in all – and a number of concert halls and assembly rooms (including the one at perhaps the best hotel in the empire, the "Grand-Hôtel Pupp", subsequently "Moskva", in Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad). In addition, the firm built another eighteen theatres in neighbouring countries.



Before later alterations and additions, it was possible for a theatre subscriber to sit in the "same" seat at the Zurich Opera House or the Civic Theatre in Graz, or in their counterparts in Zagreb/Agram in Croatia, Ostrau/Ostrava in Moravia (Czechoslovakia), Thorn/Torun in Poland, Fiume/Rijeka on the Adriatic, Jassy/Iasi in Romania and Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca in Transylvania. In addition, there were only very minor differences between the seating plans of the "Ronacher" in Vienna, the Népszínház (People's Theatre) in Budapest, the Deutsches Theatre (now the Smetana Theatre) in Prague and the theatres in Baden near Vienna, Gablonz/Jablonec in northern Bohemia and Meran in South Tyrol.

Another element common to many buildings designed by Fellner & Helmer was discovered only fairly recently. Nowadays record prices are paid at international auctions for works by Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), the revolutionary among Viennese painters. In his early years, he and his brother decorated the interiors of theatres virtually as piece-work. He is also said to have painted part of the (unsigned) murals along the staircases of Vienna's Burgtheater. The one theatre interior that Klimt did claim as his own work no longer exists: The private theatre that Fellner & Helmer built for Count Nikolaus Esterházy at his country house in Tata, Hungary, in 1888 was demolished in 1913.

The shared theatre culture is only part of the answer to the question of what Central Europeans have in common. There is more to it than imperial yellow and *The Merry Widow*, otherwise Yugoslavia would not have come apart along the dividing line between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires.

They shared not only a culture of theatre architecture. The "culture" cultivated by the officers corps of the Habsburg Austrian army was another factor common to all. This culture was described by Joseph Roth in *Radetzky-marsch* and shared by other writers such as Robert Musil and Heimito von Doderer. It failed because the prevailing attitude was too aesthetic and – unlike that of the officers' Prussian and Russian counterparts – not militaristic enough.

And then there was the Habsburg Austrian civil service: unimaginative ("rules are rules") but, in the final analysis, correct and incorruptible – unlike all of its successors.

The trains, including those between Czernowitz and Vienna, ran on time. The postal service was more efficient and quicker than today's. Even the system of payments was ahead of its time. Although civilization meant very different things in Vorarlberg and Galicia, there was no difference in the way the post office was run in both places.

Observing this in 1883, the economist Georg Coch had the idea of letting the post office take over the laborious interbank system of payments. Even the smallest village had a post office. This institution, moreover, was regarded as uncorrupted and post office officials were known for their secrecy and discretion. Georg Coch founded the "K.k österreichisch-ungarische Postsparcasse" (Austro-Hungarian Post Office Savings Bank), which had a network of 4000 post offices linked by telegraph. The postal giro cheque, which later found international acceptance, was also introduced by Coch. It gave travellers access to their post office savings accounts at any time, regardless of whether they happened to be in Chernovtsy/Czernowitz or Trieste, Karlsbad/Karlovy Vary or Grosswardein/Oradea.

Which brings us back to architecture and railways: Otto Wagner and Ödön Lechner's post office savings banks in Vienna and Budapest were epoch-making buildings.

The heavily guarded mail coaches of the Austrian state railways, the private Südbahn company and the Hungarian state railways transported money between Chernovtsy/Czernowitz and Vienna, Vienna and Trieste, Prague and Eger, and Kronstadt/Braşov and Katowice/Kattowitz considerably more safely than it ever had been before or ever would be again.

The cultural area of the Habsburg empire is defined primarily by architectural elements: the Schönbrunn-yellow facades, the pretentious Ring architecture emulated in even the smallest provincial town, the Jugendstil of the Vienna Secession and, not least, the uniform appearance of railway stations from Lemberg to Trieste, from Salzburg to Kronstadt and from Pilsen to Timisoara. Even now they still contribute more to the cityscape than all the drab socialist apartment blocks claiming to be new cities for new people.

Architecture is history in stone. It is not so easy to renew as official flags, or pictures of emperors and presidents which – even at the time of Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Schwejk* – were being defecated upon by flies before the eyes of the police spy Bretschneider. Whereas linguistic nationalism at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century managed to destroy a great deal, the common language of architecture survived.

The architect Otto Wagner (born 1841, died 1918 – the same year as the Austro-Hungarian monarchy), together with his numerous pupils, exercised a crucial influence on the development of European architecture in the central European successor states up until the Second World War. Today his Vienna urban railway (*Stadtbahn*) would be called an architectural *Gesamtkunstwerk*: everything from the railings on the bridges and the platform canopies to the interiors of the railway carriages was given his distinctive style.

Certain elements used in Vienna's *Stadtbahn*, some of which were prefabricated, can, like Habsburg yellow, be found in all the successor states. The platform surrounds in Dubrovnik on the Adriatic have the same cast-iron railings with a sun pattern – made in Blansko in the "Moravian Switzerland" – as the subway stairs connecting the platforms of the main stations in Brno and Cracow. They can also be found at the Naschmarkt in Vienna and along the spa promenade in Meran.

Otto Wagner was one of a number of important artists, technical experts and intellectuals in the twilight years of the Habsburg empire who made their name despite, and not because of, the monarchy. By joining the Vienna Secession, a group of young artists whose ideas were revolutionary for the time, Wagner, already an established town planner and professor, fell into permanent disfavour at court. Franz Ferdinand, the crown prince who was assassinated in Sarajevo, made a point of obstructing the realization of almost

all of Wagner's projects (the one exception in these years was the Vienna building of the Post Office Savings Bank).

This did at least allow Wagner to devote more time to his students. Few of them came from Vienna, with its love of intrigue. Most were from the up-and-coming provinces of the Habsburg empire: Adolf Loos, Joseph Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich.

Among them were two friends whose work would later shape the new national awareness of their respective peoples, although their personal styles, while rooted in the same Viennese tradition, were very different: Jan Kotěra, a Czech, and Jože Plečnik. Like Wagner, both were teachers as well as architects (František L. Gahura, the architectural designer of the Bata's model city of Zlín, studied under Kotěra, Plečnik and Le Corbusier).

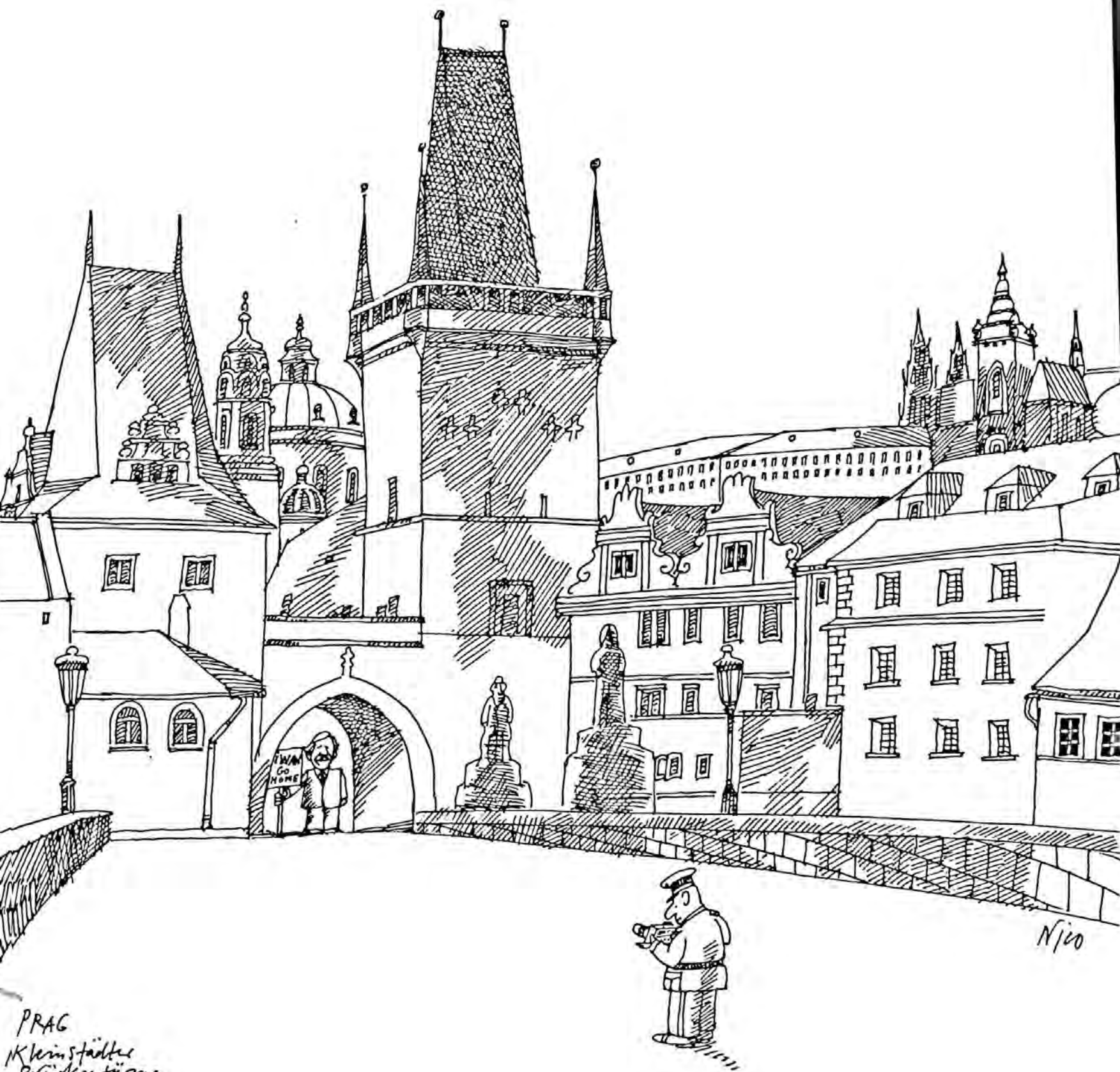
Whereas Otto Wagner straddled the transition from historicism to modern architecture – a development in which his writings played a crucial role – his pupil Kotěra was one of the most consistent modernists. Partly due to his efforts, in the 1920s and 30s Czechoslovakian architecture built the largest number of "modern" houses in all Europe.

Plečnik was different. He consistently sought traditional, national forms of expression. He found modern architecture on the whole too cold and too rational. An ascetic, almost "Protestant" Catholic and trained craftsman (in Slovenia he had first done an apprenticeship as a carpenter, before as a young man working his way on foot over the Semmering to Vienna), he took an interest in the religious background of the materials with which he worked (wood and stone). This interest would lead him to return in part to classical forms.

Plečnik's work also brings together two cities whose cultural backgrounds have much in common: Prague and Ljubljana/Laibach.

Through his friend Kotěra he obtained a position at the School of Arts and Crafts in Prague (Franz Ferdinand had successfully prevented his appointment as Otto Wagner's successor at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts). There Plečnik later got to know the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

Masaryk, a man who wished to strengthen the connections between the western and southern Slavs, recognized Plečnik's abilities and put him in



PRAG
Kleinstädter
Brückentürme
und Hradshin

charge of converting Prague Castle, a complex of buildings on the Hradcany from very different epochs, into a coherent whole. The task was an important one for a young state like Czechoslovakia that needed symbols with which it could present and represent itself.

Plečnik was subsequently commissioned to alter the president's country residence at Lány near Prague, where Masaryk was later buried in the simple village cemetery.

Plečnik's solution reflected the modesty of a man who knew how to integrate his own architectural forms into the wider context. His unmistakable style is revealed in a closer examination of the details of staircases, garden walls, gates, courtyard paving and the pair of gigantic, yet entirely appropriate flag-poles at the entrance to the Hradcany.

The degree of Plečnik's self-effacement on account of his public position is illustrated by his relationship with Masaryk's daughter Alice. Although both were very fond of each other, their friendship remained platonic because Plečnik sought to avoid any favour or personal advantage under all circumstances.

This attitude reflects what may be taken as a fundamental part of the Slovenian character. In letters to friends Plečnik often refers to the modesty and earnestness of a people of craftsmen that seek to impress by the quality of their work, not by contempt and bluff (qualities widespread at the court in Vienna).

In this respect he was at one with the best traditions of Bohemia and with Masaryk, who, like Hus, put "the truth and nothing but the truth" above everything. Although, unlike Plečnik, he did not practise institutionalized religion, Masaryk believed in the principle of "Jesus, not Caesar" – non-violence and love, not power.

On the Hradcany in Prague Jozé Plečnik worked to great effect, combining modesty with a pathos dictated by the spirit of the age. He repeated this achievement perhaps with even greater sensibility in Ljubljana, the Slovenian capital, for which he designed a number of important architectural monuments.

A well-read people

The most monumental of these buildings is the National and University Library built from 1936 onwards. Perhaps Unesco statistics best give an idea of its significance for the Slovenes: more books are translated into Slovenian than into any other language in the world, and the Slovenes read more printed matter per capita than any other people in the world.

The same cannot be said of the Serbs, who all too soon revealed themselves as a more assertive partner than the Slovenes, but one that would long be plagued by illiteracy. Whereas the rest of Yugoslavia soon accepted the "baksheesh tradition" that the Serbian bureaucracy had inherited from the Ottoman empire, Slovenia still stands out on account of the "Protestant scruples" it incorporated into its Roman Catholic ethic in the years before the Reformation was crushed in the Habsburg territories.

In Ljubljana Plečnik also created a unique urban development that is without equal in Europe. Not even some brutal changes wrought under Tito have ruined its charm. Combining Habsburg tradition, modernism and Slovenian folk art, he designed an environment around the small Ljubljanica River that flows through the city: the trees and shrubs on the banks, the three central bridges connecting the old city on the left bank and the new city on the right, and the street furniture such as columns, street-lamps with candelabras, stone borders and stone pyramids to separate pedestrians and vehicles.

It was no coincidence that Slovenia's first postage stamp, issued to mark the country's proclamation of independence on 26 June 1991, depicts Plečnik's design for the Slovenian parliament building, which was turned down by Belgrade.

Malice is a key to understanding what happened in Yugoslavia, in that it divided the country more deeply than all that caused the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918. Austria-Hungary may have been a "multi-ethnic prison" with a number of very serious problems. But it was bearable for all who lived there, even if only because of a sloppiness (*Schlamperei*) that was mistaken for tolerance. In contrast to Austria-Hungary, however, little remains of the royal dictatorship of Greater Serbia or of Tito's communist Yugoslavia, apart from "balkanized" railway stations and a few monuments to a dubious partisan myth from the post-Second World War period: "Caesar instead of Jesus".

When German was not yet German

67

When I was about to visit Prague for the first time in the 1960s, an old friend gave me a good piece of advice: if I wanted any information, I should ask in French. As a rule, people would then ask if I understood German and reply in German. If, however, one asked in German straight away, a shrug of the shoulders would be the only reply. This method has stood me in good stead for many years.

My Czech friends' sons and daughters, a generation younger than I, speak German without exception or resentment. Long before the fall of Communism in Europe, an ability to understand and speak German had become a sign of education. People who had learnt German from textbooks or records produced in the GDR, which was normal at the time, made an effort to expand their specifically East German vocabulary with words from Habsburg Austria and to replace the Saxon GDR accent with that of Vienna or (as people in Czechoslovakia stressed) Prague. The German used on the stage of Vienna's Burgtheater, and indeed the benchmark for all German-speaking theatre, was – a Czech actor instructed me – Prague German.

Signs at Prague's Wilson Station – once the *Franz-Josephs-Bahnhof*, then Prague Main Station – and at Masaryk Station, the former Austrian State Railway Station, renamed *Praha střed* (Prague Central) by the communists, were always in German as well as Czech and Russian. This may have less to do with Prague's past as a German-speaking city than with German's role as international lingua franca: Hungarians, Poles and Czechs have never used Russian to communicate with one another, even when they all had to learn it in school. For many the common idiom remained German, Habsburg German.

According to a Czech translator I once met, the linguistic finesses of Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Schwejk* could not be translated into other languages. With one exception: Grete Reiner's translation into Habsburg German. She had found a proper rendering of phrases that otherwise existed only in Czech.

Václav Havel has always regretted not having learnt German, as his schooling was cut short by the communists. He later learnt English in prison, and was just starting on German when his studies were interrupted by the revolution in 1989.

Another reason for his regret is his awareness as an author of just how important the German literature of his home town is for Czech writing and for his country's political development. The "Prague Spring" of 1968 was preceded by debates in the Czechoslovakian Writers' Union, which, in turn, were the result of a Kafka Symposium. It had been organized in 1966 by two communist reformers of Jewish origin, Eduard Goldstücker from Prague and Ernst Fischer from Vienna. The symposium broke two long-standing taboos of the socialist culture in Czechoslovakia: the post-1945 denial of Prague's Jewish-German culture, and the branding of members of the so-called Prague Circle – Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Werfel and Max Brod – as "bourgeois decadents".

But it would still be a long time before their works appeared in Prague. In spring 1991 I saw a queue in front of a shop in Prague for the first time in many years. People were waiting to buy the newly published Czech edition of Franz Werfel's works, whose appearance coincided with a well-attended Prague exhibition on Werfel's life and work.

This is not the place to discuss in detail Prague's lost Czech-German symbiosis or the tragic enmity between the two languages in multilingual Bohemia since the second half of the 19th century. The problem of the so-called "Sudeten Germans" has little to do with the Central European world depicted here through anecdotes and historical tableaux. Suffice to say that the development of the relationship between Germans – or rather German-speaking Habsburg Austrians – and Czechs that culminated in the forced expulsion of millions of people is one of the greatest tragedies of this region. Repaying injustice with injustice on the basis of collective guilt led directly to the organized injustice of the communist state, whose victims were the Czechs themselves. Václav Havel did the right thing at the start of his presidency when he asked his fellow citizens to admit their guilt and to come to terms with this past.

The tragedy of the vicious circle of German and Czech prejudice was exceeded only by the unique tragedy of the Jews of this region: Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka, Theresienstadt – the first three in Poland, the last in Czechoslovakia – are names that will always be associated with any concept of "Central Europe". The Holocaust destroyed a people who had been

pivotal to this region's cultural life and a crucial ingredient in Central Europe's distinctive multi-ethnic mix.

When the Germans entered Prague in 1939, German culture exited: from the German theatre, through German science, to the *Prager Tagblatt*, which had long been one of the most respected German-language newspapers (and especially after the Nazi Party took power in Germany).

The Jews had performed a similar function as keepers of German culture in Hungary. German played an important role here as well, though not to the same extent as in Bohemia and Moravia.

As late as about 1850 a majority of the inhabitants of Ofen (Buda) and Pest spoke German. Even today there are islands of German-speakers along the Danube and in western Hungary. Budapest grew rapidly and the importance of German waned. By 1900 less than five percent of the inhabitants spoke German as their mother tongue. But over a third of Budapest's population was bilingual and had a command of German. Hungary's leading financial and political newspaper, the *Pester Lloyd*, was published in German until the end of the Second World War. Today there is a *Neuer Pester Lloyd* that appears at least once a week.

The German-language newspapers that reappeared or continued to be published in Prague and Budapest, the *Prager Wochenblatt*, the *Budapester Rundschau* and the *Budapester Neueste Nachrichten* (which appeared together with the English-language *Daily News*), were pale copies of their predecessors. But at least there are people who write and read them. In Prague the *Prager Zeitung* is trying hard to become a worthy successor to the former *Tagblatt*.

Incidentally, Austrians are again teaching German in Warsaw, Cracow, Prague, Bratislava, Znojmo, Győr, Szombathely and Budapest. Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians can now once again hear the more familiar Austrian accent instead of the GDR idiom. German language courses at the Austrian Cultural Institutes in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest are booked out for years ahead.

And since 1989 guests arriving at Vienna's Franz-Josephs-Bahnhof have once again been able to obtain information in Czech.

The church tower of Gornja Radgona

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Whistling loudly, the veteran steam locomotive on loan from the private Graz-Köflach Railway chugged through the Mur Valley from Spielfeld to Bad Radkersburg, pulling carriages packed with Styrian notabilities. Awaiting them in front of beflagged, imperial-yellow station buildings stood brass bands, maids of honour bearing trays of brimming glasses, mayors whose well-prepared speeches were always too long, and inquisitive schoolchildren. Almost the same scene as one hundred years earlier, when His Excellency Baron Kübeck, Governor of Graz in the name of His Imperial Majesty Franz Joseph I, had opened to traffic the 57 kilometre line that the private Südbahn Gesellschaft had built between Spielfeld-Strass and Luttenberg.

But not quite the same. For today the line begins at the Slovenian border and ends at the Slovenian border, an unimportant branch line that does not really go anywhere. Luttenberg is now called Ljutomer, and Radkersburg is a divided city: Bad Radkersburg on the left bank of the Mur River is Austrian, Gornja Radgona/Oberradkersburg on the right bank is Slovenian. Trains no longer run between them, as SS units blew up the Mur Bridge ahead of the advancing Russians and Tito's partisans in May 1945, in the dying days of the Second World War. It was never repaired.

For who today wants to travel to Ljutomer or on to Varaždin in Croatia, where the only reminder that these were once Austro-Hungarian garrison towns is the imperial-yellow plaster of the barracks subsequently taken over by the Yugoslav army? The imperial Austrian officers with their Schönbrunn accents who mingled with their Slovene counterparts at the hotel *Zur Stadt Graz* in Luttenberg, or the Hungarian Honvéds who lodged with Croats at the *King of Hungary* in Varaždin undoubtedly got on better than the "armour-plated" communists from Serbia and Montenegro who succeeded them. But by then a different era had dawned.

In 1919 the Treaty of Saint-Germain redrew the borders: Ljutomer and Gornja Radgona, Celje/Cilli and Maribor/Marburg an der Drau, in other words the whole of Lower Styria, became part of the new "Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", which the Serbs later turned into the centralized southern Slav state of Yugoslavia.

The peacefulness of the Mur belies the level of hate gratuitously generated on both sides at that time. In 1938, on the occasion of Austria's *Anschluss* with Hitler's Germany, more swastikas were hung out in Radkersburg than elsewhere in the country. And when the German army crossed the Mur into Slovenia on 6 April 1941 they were accompanied by any number of locals who knew exactly whom they had in their sights. Slovenians in Gornja Radgona did not believe it was an accident that one of the first bullets fired on this Palm Sunday hit Martin Gaberc, the Catholic priest, as he was getting ready to celebrate the early mass. The cleric had stepped up to the window of the presbytery to see what all the noise was about. He had gained notoriety for his defence of the Slovene language and culture against both Germans and Serbs.

In 1945, the fight for Radkersburg continued after the war was over elsewhere. Officers of the Serbian partisan forces wanted to reunite the town under Tito's star; they wanted the bridgehead on the left bank of the Mur to be Yugoslav too. Having completed their task of liberating Radkersburg against fierce resistance from SS and Gestapo troops (a battle commemorated by a monument on the Austrian side of the Mur), the officers of the Red Army were disinterested in the local struggle. The British – Styria was part of their zone of occupation – finally ended the skirmishing between the Yugoslav units and the newly formed Austrian border patrol by deciding in favour of the Austrians.

Years later these war scenes were repeated on the right bank of the Mur following the Slovenes' declaration of independence on 26 June 1991. Armoured units of the People's Army of Yugoslavia occupied Gornja Radgona, only to have their lines of supply from Ljutomer cut off by the Slovenian territorial army. Tanks and infantry of the Austrian army took up positions along the border on the Austrian side of the Mur; the civilian population of Radkersburg had to be evacuated after grenades landed on Austrian territory. The troops of the People's Army, still under communist command, were encircled and tried desperately to shoot their way out. The Yugoslav airforce came to their support, setting several houses in Gornja Radgona on fire, among them the presbytery in which Father Martin Gaberc had been killed in 1941. A tank shell blasted the baroque onion-top off the tower of the im-

perial-yellow parish church. Elsewhere in Slovenia and Croatia, orthodox communist Serbs vented their rage on Catholic ecclesiastical buildings and public buildings dating from the Austro-Hungarian era.

Later, the tanks of the People's Army withdrew from Gornja Radgona, and the Austrian army engineers defused the explosives with which they had mined the road bridge over the Mur as a precautionary measure. Slovenes and Austrians crossed the demarcation line and flung their arms around one another's necks. Styrian craftsmen are in the process of repairing the damaged church of Gornja Radgona: the nave is resplendent in a fresh coat of yellow, and Austrian specialists will solder a new copper onion for the tower.

The town halls of Radkersburg and Ljutomer are drawing up plans to restore the railway line over the Mur. A steam engine is already standing by for the inaugural crossing: one of the locomotives which ran on the Spielfeld-Luttenberg line of the Südbahn Gesellschaft ended up in Moravia, where it survived as the works engine of a sugar factory. A group of Czech railway workers got together and carefully restored the locomotive, the oldest in the Czechoslovakian state railways fleet. In the early summer of 1991, as part of the celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the opening of the first section of the Austrian Südbahn, the veteran completed a spectacular first run under its own steam to Vienna Neustadt, the site of the long since demolished locomotive factory where it was built. Since then the tank engine has been used for nostalgic rides around the railway yards at Hradec Králové (Königgrätz), the town made famous by the fateful battle in which Prussia defeated Austria in 1866.

On 2 June 1991 a new era of train travel began in Germany with the inauguration of the ICE, the Inter City Express that runs at speeds of up to 250 km/h. On this date, though, European railway history was not made in Munich or Wiesbaden or Hamburg, but on a modest scale in Prague.

In the magnificent former imperial reception rooms in Prague's main railway station, Joseph Fanta's monumental imperial-yellow *Jugendstil* edifice built in 1901–09, guests from all over Europe, including the president of the International Railway Union (UIC) and the chairman of the French national railways (SNCF), toasted the arrival of the first EuroCity train in Czechoslovakia with pilsner beer. Now that Prague had regained its mantle as "Europe's secret capital", they were celebrating the return of the European railways to the city that had once built Europe's most sumptuous trains.

The Ringhoffer carriage works in the Prague suburb of Smíchov produced not only the luxurious sleepers of the Orient Express with their exquisite marquetry in teak and jacaranda, but also the saloons and restaurant cars in which emperors and kings, fashionable society and the demimonde wined and dined their way across the Continent during the *Belle Epoque*. All these carriages started their journey from what was then the *Kaiser-Franz-Josephs-Bahnhof*. Today this station once again bears the name bestowed upon it when the First Republic was founded in 1918: *Wilson nádraží* (Wilson Station). This name was given in honour of Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), the American president who, in accordance with his "Fourteen Points", had insisted on an independent Czechoslovakian state at the peace conferences of 1918/19. On 17 November 1990, the first anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, another American president, George Bush, officiated at the ceremony to restore the name of his Democratic predecessor. The railway carriages in which the Germans signed the armistice in the forest of Compiègne on 11 November 1918 also came from the Ringhoffer coach factory in Prague.

The fact that the two names epitomize the dilemma that strained relations between the two neighbours in the past no longer bothered the Austrian visitors. As it was, the first "EuroCity" arrived from the city from which trains to Prague traditionally came. At one time the connection between Vienna and Prague was so important that three different private railway companies

competed for passengers and freight: the Franz-Josephs-Bahn, the Austrian national railway company and the Austrian North-Western Railway.

There was little of this, though, in recent decades. On account of deliberate delays at the border, travelling between the Danube and the Vltava/Moldau had become an ordeal. Not that today's *Antonín Dvořák* EuroCity breaks any speed records as it trundles through the meadows and forests of Bohemia. But for the first time since the Second World War, the citizens of Vienna can take a day trip to Prague, stroll across the Charles Bridge to the Hradcany, and enjoy a beer at Fleck's or a Grosser Brauner in the coffee-house of the Hotel Europe on Wenceslas Square.

The EuroCity from Vienna South Railway Station has to make a small detour via Břeclav/Lundenburg, Brno/Brünn and Havlíčkův Brod because the former main line is not electrified. Despite this, there is now (for the first time since World War I) a faster connection between the cities than the express trains which the Franz-Josephs-Bahn used to operate via Tábor. These were hauled by "Class 310" *k.k. Staatsbahn* steam locomotives designed by Karl Gölsdorf (1861-1916), the great Austrian engine-builder.

Antonín Dvořák is an apposite choice of name for a train. Not only was the Czech composer frequently inspired by the rhythm of train wheels, but he was also an almost fanatical railway enthusiast. His most gifted student of composition and later son-in-law, Joseph Suk (1874-1935), father of the violin soloist of the same name, incurred Dvořák's displeasure by failing to identify the class of engine which had hauled the train he had taken to visit his intended fiancée's father. Because Suk did not know that the term "Pacific" denoted the 2-3-1 (or 2-C-1) axle sequence (later immortalized by Arthur Honegger), indeed knew little outside the study of composition, Dvořák wanted to refuse the "philistine" the hand of his daughter

Czechoslovakia was the second former East Bloc country after Hungary to join western Europe's EuroCity network. However, the inaugural train from Vienna to Prague still travelled westwards, for Prague has always lain – even in the years when train travel was obstructed by interruptions, delays and pretexts – one hundred kilometres west of Vienna. It is the more western of the two cities in other aspects too.

It was not nostalgia that brought the Paris-based UIC and SNCF executives to Prague to see “the course of history corrected” on 2 June 1991 – even though the celebrations on Prague’s freshly restored Wilson Station featured a gleaming blue steam locomotive from the 1920s and, parked by its “home platform”, President Masaryk’s newly and lovingly restored club car. This superb example of Ringhoffer craftsmanship had been built in 1930 for the 80th birthday of the founder of the Czechoslovakian state. When (assuming the plans of the UIC are realized) high-speed TGVs, ICEs and Pendolini link Berlin with Vienna, Budapest, Rome and Athens, and Paris with Moscow, Prague could again be to railways what it has always been to culture (and the music of Antonín Dvořák): the centre of Europe, the meeting point of West and East, North and South.

For more than four decades a wide, smoothly surfaced and well-maintained Austrian federal highway ended abruptly in no-man's-land. On the other side a tree-lined avenue covered in dense vegetation gave away what had once been the road's continuation. A watchtower stood within shooting distance of the border. In front of it a double barbed-wire fence severed the former artery. One could sense that the dead-straight line behind it was now the exclusive preserve of the military.

If asked about the villages on the other side of the border, the Austrians in the nearest village – a wine-growing hamlet with a *Heuriger* (farmers' tavern) typical of the region – could say little about what it was like “over there”.

The people had grown used to living “at the end of the world”; the other side hardly interested them any more. Their position as a border community was relevant once a year, when the mayor made his annual trip to the capital to present their claims to a share of the “border zone fund”. The generation that had known people “over there” was growing older and older. Their memories of their southern Moravian neighbours were mixed with memories of the expulsion of German-speaking inhabitants after the Second World War: “We don't know anybody there any more”.

The “hub function” that Austria and Vienna are always said to have enjoyed during the long years of the Cold War existed only in the minds of a few intellectuals, politicians and those with hopes of making money out of it. Invoking the “idea of Central Europe” and the “renaissance of a common Danube region” was also nothing more than wishful thinking, contradicted by the reality of the border zone.

Outsiders who had visited both sides of the demarcation line knew more about the interests people either side of the border had once shared than the locals themselves. They were struck by the similarities between the towns, villages, church towers and imperial-yellow manor houses with their huge estate farms. The locals only knew that everything was different on the other side – including the people, “the communists and Bohemians”. They gradually forgot that the neighbouring regions of Upper and Lower Austria, Bohemia and Moravia had been part of the same state for longer than the two Germanies.

People here were even less prepared for the spectacular collapse of Communism in the late autumn of 1989 than the Germans. When the barbed wire fence between Austria and Czechoslovakia came down, the immediate effect was gridlock in the streets of Vienna and Linz. The "hub" had seized up, traffic planning had concentrated lopsidedly on the south and west. The once dense central European railway network focused on Berlin and Vienna had fallen into disuse. This first sudden surge soon calmed down, but other obstacles would appear before long.

The international media, fixated by the reopening of the Brandenburg Gate and the demolition of the Berlin Wall, failed for the most part to notice other memorable happenings along the border.

When in December 1989 the Czechoslovakian border guards started to pull down the fence that had been reinforced just months before, the commanders of the voluntary fire brigades in Reinthal in Lower Austria and Břeclav (Lundenburg) in Moravia were the first to establish contact, followed by the mayors and the district commissioners.

On 17 December 1989 – just a month after the Prague police had bloodily ended the student demonstration that culminated in the Velvet Revolution – the estranged neighbours along the highway that had once linked Vienna and Lundenburg were shaking hands again.

Sceptical Lower Austrian farmers stood next to the small wooden customs hut waiting to see how things would develop. Two border police watched that no one stepped over the invisible borderline. The Czech vanguard, too, a brass band in Moravian national dress, played polkas at a safe distance behind the somewhat weathered enamel plaque depicting the lion of Bohemia.

There was already a sense of disappointment in the air when suddenly an enormous Czechoslovakian flag appeared above the horizon behind the watchtower. At first one saw only a dozen people, then more and more – hundreds, thousands of people holding hands in long rows, all beaming, a huge chain of happiness. They had longed for this moment far more deeply than the Austrians, who lived in freedom. At the border sign they paused, until someone started singing the national anthem: "Kde domov můj? – Where is my fatherland?"

Slowly it dawned on the Austrians what was happening. Embarrassed, they removed their hats in respect. Then people started hugging each other, at first just one or two, their eyes filled with tears of joy. The Austrian firemen had prepared a basin of punch that quickly proved to be too small. Along with their musical instruments the Czechs had brought bottles of wine, beer and slivovitz. Soon people were dancing around a boundary stone in the middle of a field. And – inconceivable in the television-addicted West unless inebriated – they were singing!

After two hours the groups separated again, after each person had hesitantly taken a few steps on the other side. Only the quickest were able to get to the nearest village and back in that time. People were on foot and the border was open only at certain points for a limited period: now it was up to the bureaucrats in Vienna and Prague.

Ruminating about the day on his way home, a Reinthal farmer suddenly realized that he had not actually talked with “the people from over there” during their short spell together. Indeed, what would they have talked about, and in which language? They were strangers. At least they had been able to toast one another. Yet, they were not really all that different, the Bohemians: “They’re not to blame that the Russians stayed on a bit longer there than here. My God, when I think what poor devils we were before 1955.”

Fifteen months later Reinthal-Břeclav is a normal border crossing. The watchtower is gone. The bushes have been cleared away. An asphalted road runs between the avenue of trees again. It is open only to Austrian and Czechoslovakian citizens for the time being, but there is not much traffic anyway.

“At first everybody wanted to go across to the Bohemians. To buy food, as much as they wanted, for next to nothing – until we and the Bohemians started to crack down. It’s not on that we buy up all they’ve got; they’ve hardly anything as it is. They learnt that themselves quickly enough. There’s nothing over there. At first the Bohemians also came over here, just to look. But they’ve got no money. So it’s time they stayed home. What do they want here without money?”

The Austrian customs officer is anything but happy: "They could have saved themselves the new border crossing." He's fed up with the extra work caused by illegal immigrants, Poles, Romanians, gypsies. "I don't mind the Czechs. They're decent enough. Except they've got no money. But just wait until the Russians start coming. No thanks!"

Everything had been much easier before. The Iron Curtain had kept everyone in their place – criminals and smugglers included. Even rabies and foot-and-mouth disease. And the Russians!

Regular soldiers of the Austrian army now patrol the Hungarian border.

"Over there" a few elderly men sit in a small Moravian beer tavern behind their mugs of beer, taking just the occasional sip. One of them, speaking in the German dialect of Lower Austria, remarks that the most noticeable change in the village is not political: "Beer costs more and the local agricultural cooperative gets less. The state-run chains can buy in their supplies more cheaply abroad."

"Maybe our children will benefit"

Only one of the men had visited Austria in the previous summer. Everything was very nice, but much too expensive. "Madness!" The Nazis had sent him to do forced labour. "It was all German then, and I was Czech." He had also worked for a time for farmers in Lower Austria. "But they're dead now; I didn't meet anybody else I might have known. It's not a time one likes to think about."

None of the others were thinking of visiting Austria in the near future. Only the youngest of them had any regrets: "For years I tried to imagine what it would be like to just drive over there. I was so happy when the border opened. Suddenly there were people everywhere. So I said to myself, you've waited so long, another month or two won't make any difference. All I've done my whole life is stand in queues. What does it matter! In the meantime I've lost interest. Should I go over there and let people look upon me as a poverty-stricken neighbour? – Maybe our children will benefit."

Nor has the intellectual from Brno/Brünn – which is within day-tripping distance from Vienna, its former sister-city – made much use of the open border. Once he took his grandchildren to see Schönbrunn and the Kunsthistori-

sches Museum; another time he bought medicine for his sister-in-law in Retz. "Look, we're very poor now. A cup of coffee in Vienna costs as much as the average worker earns in a day. Not including petrol for the journey. One thinks twice about going there."

The man adds regretfully: "It's ironic. The closer people get to one another, the further away they are. Throughout the terrible years, we treasured the memory of what it had once been like when things were normal. We made every effort to pass this on to our children as an antidote to communist indoctrination at school. We listened to Austrian radio and watched Austrian television – secretly at first, then more and more openly. We were better informed about Austrian politics than our own. Now everything has changed: it's enough just watching local television and reading local papers. In these uncertain times people also have to think about their careers and income. There's no time left for Austrian radio and television. It's a pity, but soon we'll know as little about Austria as Austrians know about us."

Even Czechs whose euphoria in November/December 1989 was tempered by clear thinking are experiencing something like a "hangover". The indirect effects of the Gulf War have exacerbated the poor state of the economy, and the collapse of Comecon, the economic community of former Eastern Bloc countries, has made it all the more necessary to urgently tackle structural change.

The economic divides that separated East and West much more strikingly than the barbed wire are growing deeper, and fewer bridges are being thrown across them than many Central Europeans had hoped.

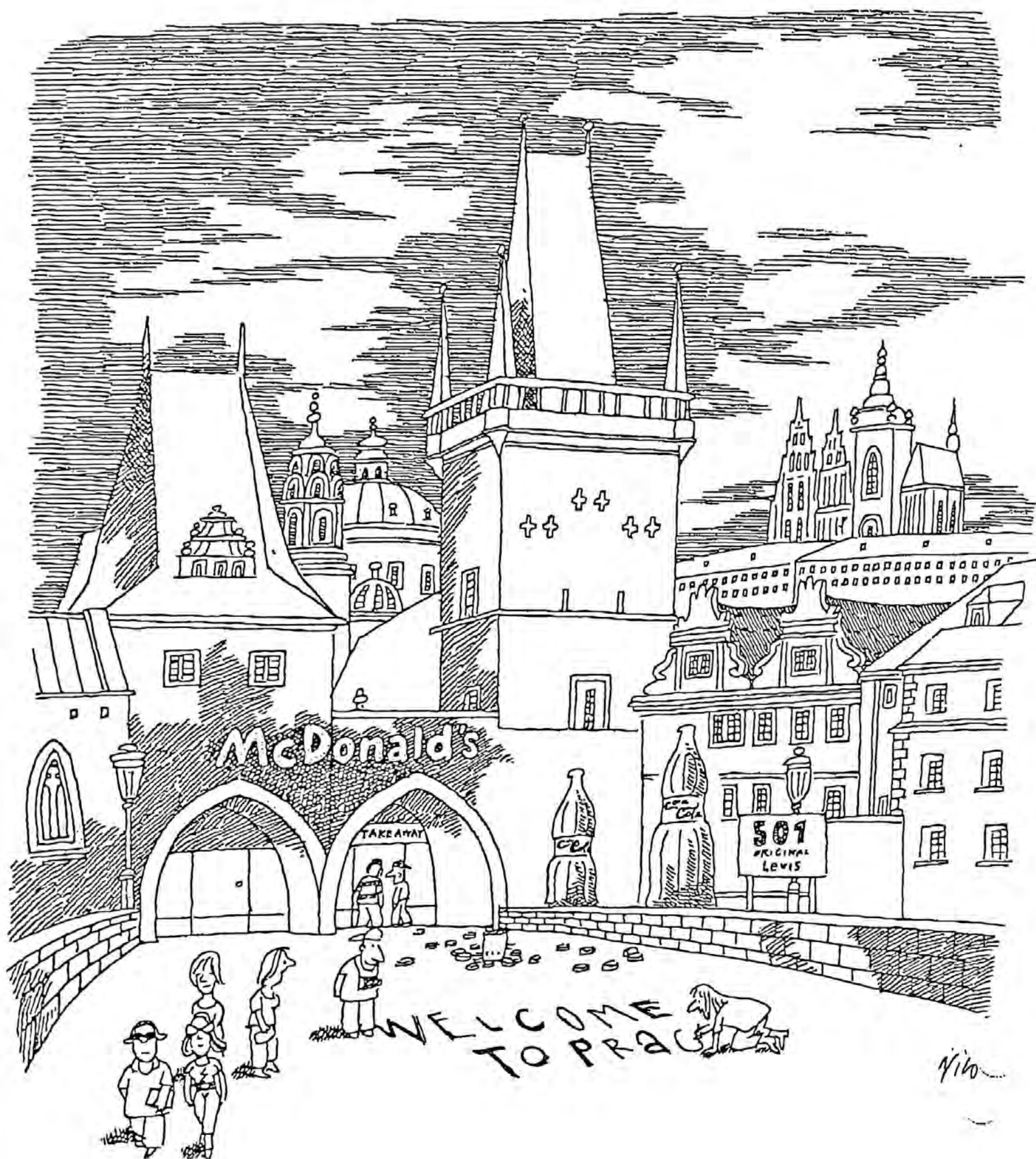
Today, foreigners crossing the border are more aware than ever of the differences in economic development, especially now that the red stars on the roofs and gateways of factories and agricultural collectives have disappeared.

Now, for the first time, the Czechs (and most other inhabitants of the former Eastern Bloc countries) really feel poor. Previously they did not have much means of comparison.

After 1945 Europe remained livelier in Prague, Warsaw and Budapest, or in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Arad, than in Zurich, Stockholm and Düsseldorf. Confronted for the first time by the unfamiliar market economy of the West, many Central Europeans are either left in a state of shock or simply succumb completely to the temptations of the consumer society.

For the more thoughtful Central Europeans, it is a painful experience to learn that there is little demand in prosperous western societies for the qualities they had secretly been so proud of – the human dimension of life in a dictatorship: resistance, solidarity and decency.

Central Europe as a Borderland
1996



Five years have passed since the last words of the first part of this book were written. In the meantime, enormous changes have taken place. Eastern central Europe has thrown off its drab ubiquitous grey uniform for a radiant coat of fresh, often clashing colours. New buildings are going up everywhere and old ones are being renovated, including a number of imperial-yellow structures. Here and there the new start has revived the glamour of a bygone age. In the former "East", tradition – as part of the rediscovered national identity – still counts for more than in the West.

Of course, there have been some slips as well – facades where the tone is off, yellows that are a touch too bright, the paint too glossy or the texture of the renovated masonry too smooth.

Some structures that stood out precisely because of their shabbiness now blend into the background on account of their fresh coats of bright paint. The yellow-ochre of the Habsburg era is just one mark among others. After the American lifestyle spent decades trying to get a foot in the door, everyday life has been Americanized in record time. Budapest, Prague and Warsaw have already lost the charm that attracted whole colonies of American artists, intellectuals and retirees at the beginning of the 1990s. For a brief moment they could enjoy the experience of a non-American Europe – imperial yellow without Coca-Cola and ketchup, as it were. The first McDonald's in Prague even took the surroundings into account, and fits into the architectural ensemble of the Golden City better than any branch in Vienna, Barcelona or Zurich.

"Bysnis"

Americanization has also left its mark on language. German, once the undisputed lingua franca of Central Europe – and still, or again, the first foreign language at high schools in the Czech Republic and Hungary – is increasingly challenged by English. German is no longer, as it was in Habsburg times, the language of the educated classes. Most people learn it to talk to foreign tourists and business travellers in their own language. The money that arrives in the East may be German, but the world is increasingly English. And "bysnis" is now part of the Bohemian vocabulary.

Even if pupils no longer pick up the Saxon dialect of German teachers trained in the German Democratic Republic, the modern German used in reforming Central Europe is not the same as classical Prague German or the Bohemian dialect of the Czech province or the unique melody of Jewish German in pre-1938 Budapest.

Imperial yellow has survived fascism and communism and retained a vividness through the years even as it faded imperceptibly. It has taken the renovations of the present to give it an "historical" patina in places.

Vienna is no longer the gateway to the world

Vienna is no longer Bohemia's, Moravia's or Galicia's gateway to the world – the former connections with the outside world, the Franz-Josephs-Bahn or the Kaiser-Ferdinand-Nordbahn, have lost much of their importance. Zurich, Paris and Frankfurt are often closer by plane than Schönbrunn is overland. The pace of change today means that fewer and fewer people have the time to mourn the past. Since the end of Communism, the future has drawn much closer to the present. The past is of interest only in so far as it can be milked for foreign exchange.

And in times like these anyone who fails to seize that opportunity becomes history.

In 1989, as the walls, fences and barricades between East and West came down, "Europe" seemed to denote a better future. Except that Europe has not kept its promise. In 1991 the celebrations in Ljubljana (Laibach) marking Slovenia's declaration of independence closed with Beethoven's Ode to Joy, the European anthem. A few hours later tanks started rolling, and Europe looked on from the sidelines.

Europe stayed on the sidelines when shortly afterwards the Yugoslav army invaded Croatia, occupied Carniola and all Slavonia and shot up Vukovar. Europe looked on as Chetniks advanced to the outskirts of Zagreb, as grenades smashed into the historical centre of Dubrovnik, and Slobodan Milošević proclaimed in Belgrade that Serbia was everywhere where there were Serbs. Europe, which had just been fancying itself as the slayer of the totalitarian ideology of Communism, was nowhere to be seen as fanatic nationalists ripped apart Bosnia in an orgy of "ethnic cleansing" and genocide to rival the worst atrocities of the Nazis.

Generations of Europeans brought up since 1945 to believe in human rights, democracy and the rule of law remained silent while barbaric hordes ravaged the Balkans, as though Europe had never renounced fascist atrocities and Stalinist terror. Peace demonstrators did not take to the streets in protest. Nor did any anticommunists denounce those Yugoslav internationalists who, simply to retain power, had transmogrified overnight into Serbian or Croatian nationalists. Official Europe organized conferences, despatched hand-shaking lords and impotent diplomats to Belgrade and Zagreb. Appeasement came back in fashion. In the footsteps of Chamberlain came Carrington and Owen.

For the third time this century yesterday's world disappeared in flames. It was no coincidence that, for the second time, Sarajevo symbolized the decline. In 1914 imperial-yellow buildings lined the last journey of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Imperial yellow lined the route as Hitler's Wehrmacht marched into the so-called "Sudeten lands" of Czechoslovakia in 1938. In the Balkan War of 1991-1995, the Serbs took particular delight in shelling any edifices representing the non-Serbian world they hated: mosques, Roman Catholic churches and, of course, imperial-yellow public buildings.

The rubble of 1918

Europe in 1996 is not where Europe thought it was at the turn of 1989. A better comparison might be 1918. Events in Yugoslavia have, for the second time, shattered the fragile central European power structure fashioned out of the rubble of the Habsburg empire at the treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon.

It seems that Europe failed to cultivate the strengths of the bygone yet unforgotten world of imperial yellow: its functional multilingualism and fertile multi-ethnicity. But Europe did conserve the Habsburg empire's intrinsic defects and weaknesses – its nationalistic superiority complex and widely institutionalized intolerance.

The smoke-filled coffee-houses of Vienna produced world-class literature, but also the demon that inspired Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Anyone who is "different" also has a difficult time of it in Austria today. Minorities such as the

Croats in Burgenland or the Slovenes in Carinthia and Styria – the last witnesses to the one-time “greater” Austria, Habsburg Austria – are still fighting for recognition as full Austrian citizens.

The metamorphosis of Mr Pospischill

In Vienna, however, the opposite can also happen. A minor civil servant had concealed his Czech name for decades. At the hairdresser's he used the name Schneider instead of his real name “Pospischill”. Impressed by the efforts of the new Czech state, the Viennese civil servant Pospischill, alias Pospíšil, is now proud of his Moravian ancestry. On his regular shopping trips to the paradise of cheap Czech duty-free shops along the Austrian border, Mr Pospischill even remembers odd words he picked up from his grandmother.

In summer 1996, at the final of the European Cup between Germany and the Czech Republic, everyone in Vienna cheered on the “Bohemians” against “Fritz”.

When the imperial-yellow world disintegrated in 1918, it left behind a vacuum in eastern central Europe and the Balkans that the solutions proposed by the victors of the First World War did not really fill. Although the new map of Europe was based on the principle of self-determination as formulated by President Woodrow Wilson, in many cases the borders of the new states were arbitrary. All the new nation-states had minorities of varying size who felt they did not belong in the new world.

Hungary had shrunk to about one-third of its former size; suddenly, counting those in America, there were more Hungarians living outside the new state than in it. Thanks to the unification of the Czechs and the Slovaks, the two “Slav brothers” in President Masaryk's new Czechoslovakian republic outnumbered the Germans and German-speakers in Bohemia and Moravia. However, the “Czechoslovakianism” propagated by Masaryk's secretary and successor, Edvard Beneš, proved to be too weak a cement. Twice, in 1938 and 1992, Czechoslovakia came apart at the seams. The similarities in language were not enough to bridge differences that had existed for centuries: differences in terms of economic development and culture, and differences in mentality rooted in different historical experiences.

Old East-West divides

This was even more true of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, as Yugoslavia was originally known (we have already touched on this in the first section, in the chapters on Ljubljana and Gornja Radgona). The quondam state straddled two continental divides:

- Since the early Middle Ages, Europe has been divided into two more or less equal halves with different historical backgrounds and experiences: the Latin West and the Orthodox East and Southeast. According to the definition offered by the German historian Imanuel Geiss¹, each half represents one of the two advanced Mediterranean civilizations of the ancient world, Rome and Byzantium. Characteristic differences include script (Latin in the West, Cyrillic in the East/Southeast) and religion (Roman Catholicism and the Protestantism derived from it, on the one hand, and Orthodoxy on the other). Slovenia and Croatia belong to the Latin West, Serbia and Montenegro to the Orthodox East; in Bosnia, where the two worlds overlap, Islam is a remnant of Ottoman rule.
- The territory of the former Habsburg Empire, in turn, reflects the dualism institutionalized in the 1867 compromise between the emperor and Hungary. The Cisleithanian (or Austrian) and the Transleithanian (or Hungarian) halves of the Dual Monarchy – the border ran along the Leitha River and Leitha Mountains east of Vienna – were worlds apart. The Austrian lands had a broadly developed system of primary education and a higher level of industrial development, trade and industry. Hungary, by contrast, was characterized by the estates of formerly serf-owning landowners and a level of compulsory schooling that was kept artificially low by the propertied nobility. Slovenes and Czechs were part of the Cisleithanian tradition, while Slovakia and Croatia (with the notable exceptions of Dalmatia and Istria) belonged to the Transleithanian world.

The world of imperial yellow – and modern Europe, too, in some respects – ended at the first dividing line, that between the Latin West and the Orthodox East. Elias Canetti, a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature who died in Zurich in 1994, describes how in the language of Rustschuk, his Bulgarian birthplace, one took the boat up the Danube not to Austria-Hungary but “to Europe”.

Most recently, the border between the Latin and Orthodox worlds separates the eastern central European world of rapid economic and democratic reform (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and – with reservations due to war – Croatia) from the remainder of the East, which is all too obviously falling behind. Imanuel Geiss believes that events since 1989 have confirmed that Latinity “is the great common denominator of western Europe, and all the more so since the eastern Latinized peoples have been free to rejoin Europe”.

The second frontier between Austria and Hungary marks out noticeable differences in mentality and development that still have political and economic implications. It has given rise to nationalistic inferiority complexes and prejudices that mar relations between Czechs and Slovaks and between Slovenes and Croats to this day.

Czechs and Slovenes, but not Slovaks and Croats, benefited from the gradual liberalization of the Austrian half of the empire after 1867, a period of cultural renaissance and rapid economic development for both peoples. Many of the most beneficial Habsburg institutions were created in the almost five decades of external peace preceding 1914. The completion of the Austrian railway network provided a powerful economic stimulus in all parts of the Austrian lands, even (as Joseph Roth describes superbly in his novels *Radetzky marsch* and *Kapuzinergruft*) in remote Galician provincial towns on the Russian border.

Developments took a different turn in the Hungarian half of the empire. The Hungarian nobility exploited Vienna's weakness after Prussia defeated Austria at the Battle of Königgrätz in 1866 to extract a “compromise” that granted the country wide-ranging autonomy. At the same time, the nobility instituted a policy of Magyarization against the country's non-Magyar peoples: Slovaks, Croats, Transylvanian Romanians and a surprisingly large

number of German-speakers were not granted any national rights. Hungarian was the exclusive language of official business and the medium of instruction in the poorly equipped state schools. Yet, even in the Hungarian heartland – the territories of the Kingdom of Hungary (Croatia and Slavonia were formally separate territories) – barely half of the total population were Magyars.

Weak Parisian bulwark

In the Treaties of Saint-Germain (1919) and Trianon (1920), the Paris Peace Conference cobbled together a new political constellation for central and southeastern Europe which, it was hoped, would serve as a bulwark against the imperialist and expansionist tendencies of the Prusso-German empire created by Bismarck, with which Austria-Hungary had all too willingly allied itself in the First World War. In reality, the system of alliances in the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, France and Poland) was unable to fill the vacuum left by the Habsburg monarchy. In the final analysis, instead of helping to contain the German drive towards the East in search of "living space", dismembering Austria-Hungary facilitated it. As Adolf Hitler prepared to invade what was left of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, the fragile order of 1919 collapsed owing to its internal diversity and conflicts – plus the weakness and vacillation of France and Britain, the western powers who failed to honour their guarantees.

The far-reaching realignment of the political map in eastern central and southeastern Europe after 1945 took place under the aegis of Stalin's Greater Russian policy of expansion. The former Habsburg Empire, with the exception of its Alpine provinces, became the western glacis of a new Eurasian empire governed from Moscow. For five decades, the new international order was in the iron grip of the East-West conflict with its policy of nuclear equilibrium, on the one hand, and the Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty for socialist states, on the other. But the "New Society" was unable to generate better feeling even between "brotherly peoples" who had lived together before – Czechs and Slovaks or the various southern-slav (Yugoslav) groups. On the contrary: although relations appeared smooth enough on the surface, Josip Bros Tito's masterly and Moscow's clumsy use of divide-and-rule poli-



— Austro-Hungarian border in 1914

cies hardened existing divisions and differences. When the clamp that held their socialist house together slipped in the East in 1989, the old borders reasserted themselves: Orthodox and Latins, Transleithanians and Cisleithanians were not interested in sharing the same house any more.

Old borders as new divides

Whereas the Czechs and Slovaks reached an amicable "divorce settlement" under international law at the end of 1992, and Slovenia – which had unilaterally declared its independence in 1991 – was a separate national unit within clearly defined linguistic borders, matters were more complicated along the former frontier between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires.

The old Austrian lines had left behind a chain of fortified Serbian villages in Croatia. And in Bosnia, converts to Islam had formed an upper class under Turkish rule that subsequently developed into a separate "nation" of Muslims.

In response to the first Turkish siege of Vienna and several wars over Hungary, King Ferdinand I, the first Habsburg ruler of the Austrian lands and later Holy Roman Emperor, settled Serbian refugees – the so-called Uskokes – along the border with the Ottoman Empire. As a reward for permanent military service, he granted them their own territory and special privileges, in particular the right to carry arms at all times. Maria Theresa, the first ruler of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine, strengthened this "military frontier" by attracting new settlers, for the most part Serbs, into areas of Croatia devastated by the Turks. The section of Serbian fortified villages ran from Knin westwards, then northwards through Slavonia and Baranya to the present border between Hungary and Croatia. Centuries later the Serbs who had "defended the West" by forming a bulwark against the Turks became Belgrade's fifth column as nationalists inflamed passions in their pursuit of a Greater Serbia.

A victory over history?

In 1945, at their Potsdam Conference after the Second World War (attended by Stalin, Truman, Churchill and Attlee), the victorious allies agreed to the expulsion of all Germans from the former Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia, from territories east of the Oder-Neisse Line and from southeastern Europe. A long and complex history of settlement and multiethnic civilization was sacrificed to the simple principle of more or less homogeneous nation-states – the norm in western Europe, and the solution the Paris Peace Conference had sought for the “Europe between the powers” after the First World War – despite the “ethnic cleansing” it implied. It was hoped that partitioning would remove some of the structural weaknesses of the political map drawn for eastern and southeastern central Europe in the political accords of 1919/20.

Although incomparably more bloody, the ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia and the partitioning of Bosnia in the 1990s was motivated by the same criterion of homogeneous nation-states. This time the West did not do anything effective to prevent it. In summer 1996, the Balkan war is looking like just another chapter in the tragic saga that began at Saint-Germain and Trianon.

The old vacuum between the North Sea and the Adriatic – in the “Europe between the powers” – is still waiting to be filled.

The rest is Austria

97

You won't find Neuhofen an der Ybbs in the list of railway stations in the 1914 Austro-Hungarian timetable or in the summer timetables of the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB). A computer won't help either. Although the ÖBB's electronic timetable contains rail information for Austria's neighbours, Neuhofen an der Ybbs does not even figure in the list of railhead stations.

Neither the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph nor the age of the railways left its mark on the small Lower Austrian village at the foothills of the Alps. Yet, if Austria has a birthplace, it is Neuhofen. At least that is how the tourist board successfully sold the place to locals and visitors on the occasion of Austria's "millennium" in 1996. There is greater certainty about the thousand years than there is about the concept of Austria, which is open to many interpretations.

Origins in Bavaria

The key document, dating from 966, is kept in the Bavarian State Archives in Munich, of all places. Historians would scarcely have paid any attention to it if the second line had not contained the first written reference to what was to become Austria (Österreich): Ostarrîchi.

The carefully preserved piece of parchment has nothing to do with the founding of an empire, let alone a thousand-year one. The paper simply records that the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III bestowed on the Bishop of Freising (in Bavaria) thirty "Königshufen" of land at Niuvanhova, the present-day Neuhofen an der Ybbs in Lower Austria. The one thousand hectares of land, in what was then the marches of the Dukes of Babenberg, had been devastated by invading Avars and abandoned. This was the most easterly part of the Holy Roman Empire, which Otto still ruled for the most part from Rome. The relevant part of the Latin text reads: "... in regione vulgari vocabula Ostarrîchi" (in the region commonly known as Ostarrîchi). The document was apparently too unimportant to even warrant a seal.



In the 10th century Ostarrîchi was certainly not an empire, but simply what was left of a greater entity in the centre of Europe – a border region on the periphery of the West. According to linguists, the Old High German word “rîchi” is derived from “rikja”, which means a region or area, certainly nothing related to the later concept of an empire.

“Ostarrîchi was what was left over”, to quote the Viennese historian Herwig Wolfram, a play on French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau’s definition of Austria at the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War: “The rest is Austria!” – that is, Austria is what remained of the Habsburg Empire after the Dual Monarchy was cut up into nation-states.

In 966, the Babenberg Marches, with their dual centres at Melk and Krems on the Danube, were the tiny remnant of a *Plaga orientalis* that once stretched from Bavaria deep into modern Croatia. This eastern empire lost half of its territory in the early 10th century when the Hungarians occupied the Carpathian Basin, the former Roman province of Pannonia. Carinthia was elevated to a duchy in 976 and given the belt of marches stretching from Istria north into Styria. All that was left over was the Babenbergs’ Ostarrîchi.

The imperial gift to the dependable see of Freising was one of a number granted with the aim of settling the country and missionizing the people to secure the empire’s frontiers. Otto viewed Ostarrîchi and the Babenberg Marches as a secure starting point for expansion and reconquest. His objective was a “*renovatio imperii Romanorum*”, a renewed Roman empire encompassing all the territories that had once fallen under its rule.

The bishopric of Freising had made a name for itself through its missionary efforts among the Slavs, something that was not concealed from the emperor. In the 10th century the inhabitants of Lower Austria were, for the most part, Slavs. Even today many place names in eastern and southeastern Austria have Slavic origins, evidence of intermarriage between Bavarian-German and Czech, Slovak and Slovenian tribes in the Danube basin. In the late 10th and early 11th centuries, Ostarrîchi, like imperial Austria later, was very much a multiethnic melting pot along the principal East-West trade route.

A count from Aargau versus the King of Bohemia

The historical continuity between Ostarrîchi at the end of the 10th century and the modern Republic of Austria has been broken several times. At times, the offshoots and secondary developments seem to be more significant. The Austria that was "left over" after 1918 is fundamentally different from the "House of Austria" that the Habsburgs built on their Babenberg inheritance. Substantial parts of modern Austria's Alpine regions long resisted Habsburg rule or – like Salzburg – were incorporated only in the 19th century. For other territories with their own proud history, such as Carinthia and Styria, passing to the Habsburgs was initially regarded as a historical setback.

In the beginning, the counts of Habsburg were lesser nobility in what is now the Swiss canton of Aargau. In the 13th century they inherited the Babenberg lands almost by accident. With them came the name Austria and the red-white-red Babenberg colours still used on the Austrian flag today. Before Rudolf of Habsburg became the founder of a new empire in eastern central Europe, he had to deal with a powerful adversary whose ideas of statehood and government were very advanced for the time.

The Holy Roman Empire had been in a crisis since the middle of the century. The idea of a uniform empire had been undermined by a nobility interested in individual advancement. The distinction between the early medieval concepts of "ownership" (land belonging to the ruling prince) and fiefdom (land bestowed by the emperor solely for administrative purposes) gradually blurred. In the end there were even two kings.

At this time a man in the eastern part of the empire devised a new order with clear economic and political goals for the lands he ruled. Přemysl Ottokar II of Bohemia brought into the country German colonists (whose agricultural methods were the most advanced), improved and expanded transport routes, encouraged the burghers in cities and markets and streamlined his administration by centralizing it, thereby clipping the wings of the lesser, local nobles who not infrequently scrounged off their subjects. He managed to expand his domains far beyond the borders of Bohemia and Moravia. Under Ottokar's dynamic leadership from 1251 to 1278, central Europe formed a large, coherent and prosperous economic area that stretched from the Sudeten Mountains to the Adriatic and included the entire eastern and south-

eastern parts of modern Austria, Slovenia, parts of Croatia and northern Italy as well as the Bohemian lands. Together with the crusader army of the Teutonic Knights, Ottokar even reached the Baltic Sea, where he founded for the Order a fortified castle that was named after him: Königsberg (today the Russian city of Kaliningrad). Ottokar never did try to fulfil his intention of extending his rule to Hungary, which was invaded repeatedly from the East.

It would take the Habsburgs considerably longer to create a state anything like Ottokar's in size in the same part of the world.

One city that Ottokar helped in particular was Vienna. And in the decisive battle between the Bohemian king and Rudolf of Habsburg, which took place on the Marchfeld between Dürnkrut and Jedenspeigen in 1278, the Viennese remained faithful to him.

However, Viennese historians subsequently painted a thoroughly distorted picture of Ottokar. In his drama *König Ottokars Glück und Ende* ("King Ottokar's Happiness and End"), published in 1823, the Austrian national poet Franz Grillparzer depicted the prudent Bohemian king, who acted in accordance with clear domestic and foreign goals, as a tyrant and criminal. Recent historians have tried to make amends (Ernst Joseph Görlich, for instance, wrote in 1988 that "in the case of Ottokar II it is necessary to put certain received opinions in the proper context").

The history of eastern central and southeastern Europe might have been quite different if Ottokar's plans for a "central kingdom" had not been defeated on the Marchfeld.

In 1273 the electoral princes chose Rudolf of Habsburg – but not because the electors wanted a strong German king and Holy Roman Emperor. They purposely chose a weak count with a powerful state instead of Ottokar because they feared decisive changes that would undermine the powers of each individual ruler. Even by contemporary Swiss standards the Habsburgs were poor. Originally they had owned just the four villages of Habsburg, Lupfig, Birr and Scherz – hence the name "Eigenamt" (owned lands) for the region at the foot of Habsburg Castle in the district of Brugg on the River Aare.

Once elected, Rudolf set about shaking things up. As new German king, he ordered the return of all royal fiefs granted since the reign of Frederick II with a view to redistributing them ("Mutung binnen Jahr und Tag" – within a

year and a day). These included the lands of Austria, Styria, Carniola and the Windisch Mark in Carinthia, which had been granted to Ottokar in 1251. The impoverished king hoped to improve his finances by "re-auctioning" the feudal tenures. This, however, would have weakened the economies of the countries concerned (the historian Karl Gutkas saw in Rudolf's step the beginning of Austria's financial policy of "robbing Peter to pay Paul"). By stubbornly refusing to obey the king's will, Ottokar provoked an imperial ban and finally the crusade against him that culminated in his death and the end of his dream of a "central kingdom".

Contrary to the tradition of feudal tenure, after his victory Rudolf I bestowed the Austrian lands on his own sons. The unimportant counts from Aargau were on their way to becoming the most important dynasty in Europe. At the height of their power, it seemed that "the sun would never set" on the Habsburg Empire.

The double eagle, the emblem of the Holy Roman Empire, became the symbol of the Habsburgs.

The "holy" and the "unholy" empires

After wearing the imperial crown for centuries without interruption, it was understandable that Habsburg Austria took matters for granted. This attitude was to prove fatal after 1848.

Franz Joseph I never understood the power of German nationalism, which was rooted in a very different definition of what was German than that of the old Holy Roman Empire. Prussia was preparing to challenge the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Under Otto von Bismarck, the later Imperial German chancellor, Prussia pursued its own German unification. The old Habsburg multi-ethnic state with its quite different history and view of the world stood in the way of Prussia's goal of becoming the leading German power.

The German Austrians were caught in a dilemma between the old, Austrian view of the multiethnic empire and the new, Prussian view of German nationalism. The gulf between the "Greater German" and the "Smaller German" solution provoked the end of the Dual Monarchy and ultimately the 1938 *Anschluss* in which Austria itself was annexed.

In the middle of the 19th century the Czech historian František Palacký formulated his conviction: "If Austria did not exist, we would have to make every effort to create it as quickly as possible." Palacký was one of the first to grasp that the spread of nationalism in Europe was potentially explosive. He also recognized that a strong Germany would be a danger to the whole of central Europe.

Palacký saw Austria's internal weakness: the Habsburg regime was incapable of containing the growing discontent of the non-German peoples of the empire, who resented the restrictions on their cultural development, by forming a federation in which all peoples would have equal rights. Austria clung to its perception of itself as a transnational state, in contrast to the rising tide of European nationalism inspired by the writings of the German Romantics.

At the same time, Palacký warned of the potential external political dangers. His prophecy that "Europe between the powers" could (as had already happened to Poland) be crushed between German and Russian imperialism if Austria could not deal with its internal weakness came true in the 20th century. Europe lost the centre that Ottokar had once tried to create and which later developed – by coincidence, rather than as a result of conscious effort – into the Habsburg Empire with its undoubted virtues: a single economic area, a functioning civil service and a fertile multiethnic cultural exchange. As the historian Friedrich Heer has shown, Prussia's victory over Austria at the Battle of Königgrätz in 1866 sealed Europe's fate in that "it led directly to the catastrophe of 1918/19"². Heer continues: "Königgrätz was the prerequisite for the artificial empire of Prussian Germany, which needed further wars to survive (a fact that both Karl Marx and conservative Germans recognized clearly), and thus for the destruction of the multiethnic state on the Danube."

The ideologies of nationalism, socialism and communism were expressions of the German and Russian drive for hegemony, which, in the decades following the collapse of Austria-Hungary, fuelled developments in the central European region between Warsaw, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Zagreb.

The missed opportunity of Austro-slavism

Palacký's "idea of the Austrian state" coloured the demands of liberals at the conference held in Kremsier (Kroměříž in Moravia), which tried to find a way out of the crisis in 1848, the year of revolution. However, the young Emperor Franz Joseph was not interested; he dissolved the diet, sent the deputies packing and prohibited the expression of liberal ideas. Austria still suffers from the lack of a liberal tradition and a middle class that takes civic responsibility seriously. In the final analysis, both the "black" Christian Social and the "red" Austro-Marxist camps were authoritarian; both placed their hopes in a paternal state rather than mature citizens.

Eventually, German nationalism and pan-Slavism filled the vacuum left by the failure of the liberal revolution. Developments in Hungary took their own course in any case. The 1867 compromise between Hungary and the crown, a direct consequence of Vienna's weakness after Königgrätz, further undermined the position of the empire's Slav peoples. The Czechs felt badly done by, as their historic claims to a separate Bohemian kingdom were as valid as those of the Hungarians; and the non-Hungarian peoples in Transleithania found themselves subjected to enormous pressure to magyarize.

In March 1848, Palacký and František Ladislav Rieger responded to the challenge of the (All-)German Assembly in Frankfurt by organizing the first Slavic Congress in Prague – with German as the conference language. To counter German, Hungarian and Russian hegemonic concepts, they called for self-determination and autonomy for the monarchy's Slavic peoples by turning the Habsburg Empire into a federation (in reference to the dualism of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, after 1867 they spoke of "trilateralism").

Austro-slavism was unlike Russian-inspired pan-Slavism (which is still alive in Serbia and Montenegro). It stressed the historical, cultural and religious differences between the Latin Slavs of Austria-Hungary and the Orthodox Slavs of the East – indeed, the very divide along which the first and second Yugoslav states broke apart in the 20th century.

The young Emperor Franz Joseph banned the Slavic Congress and Prince Windischgrätz crushed the 1848 uprising in Prague. Throughout his long reign, the "monarch for the century" showed no understanding for Slav con-

cerns – even though his non-German subjects frequently proved to be the better Austrians in the nationality struggle than their German-speaking fellow-citizens, who did not conceal their admiration for Bismarck.

In his novel *Die Kapuzinergruft* ("The Capuchins' Crypt"), Joseph Roth puts the following words in the mouth of the Austrian-Polish Count Chojnicki as he contemplates the approaching end of the monarchy:

"There is nothing remarkable about this monarchy. What I mean is that the so-called remarkable is normality in Austria-Hungary. But I also mean that only in this crazy Europe of nation-states and nationalisms does that normality appear strange. Of course, it is the Slovenes, the Polish and Ruthenian Galicians, the caftan-clad Jews from Boryslav, the horse-traders from Bacska, the Moslems from Sarajevo and the chestnut-sellers from Mostar who sing *Gott erhalte* [the imperial anthem]. The German students from Brünn and Eger, the dentists, pharmacists, hairdresser's assistants and art photographers from Linz, Graz and Knittelfeld, the gnarled peasants from the Alpine valleys all sing *Die Wacht am Rhein* [a nationalist German song]. Gentlemen, such unquestioning loyalty to the (German) cause will be the ruin of Austria! Austria is not the centre, but the periphery. Austria is not to be found in the Alps. In the Alps there are chamois and edelweiss and gentian, but scarcely anyone there knows what the double eagle stands for. Austria's substance is nourished and repeatedly replenished by the crown lands."

Franz Joseph always saw himself as a "German prince". After Königgrätz he rejected the Austro-Slavs' offer a second time. Instead of accepting them as allies who might help to counter the insidious spread of German nationalist propaganda from Berlin through sports clubs, men's choral societies, veterans' associations and duelling student fraternities, the empire left its Austro-Slav peoples to languish as second-class citizens under a German-speaking ascendancy.

Nonetheless, the Austro-Slavism of Palacký and Rieger remained popular among Czechs, Poles, Slovaks, Slovenes and Croats for a surprisingly long time. Right up to the outbreak of the First World War, the parliamentary deputy Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – unjustly called "Austria's gravedigger" by many in the first Austrian republic – defended the integrity of the Habsburg Empire. Only then did he switch his support to the so-called Young Czech



Acquisitions

- before 1740
- 1741–1792
- 1793–1813
- 1814–1914

lost again before 1918

line and – from America – campaigned for the creation of sovereign states for the western and southern Slavs. In the eyes of the Austro-Slavs, the war was Berlin's doing alone; there was no compelling reason why Austria should have entered it.

The state that nobody wanted

The "idea of Austria" became "the rest" in 1918: Austria is what was left over – "a state that nobody wanted". And those in power in this "rest" were, for the most part, supporters of a Greater Germany (Karl Renner, the founder of the republic; Otto Bauer, the leader of the Social Democratic Party). Even today, the Austrians have not quite got over the divide between "smaller" and "greater" Germany, between independence and *Anschluss*. One can still hear echoes of it in the on-going debate on Austrian membership of the European Union or on the relevance of Austria's policy of neutrality in post-Cold War Europe.

After the experience of German rule under the National Socialists, a new Austrian awareness emerged after the Second World War. It was no accident that in 1946, the first post-war year, much was made of the 950th anniversary of the Ostarrîchi document, which was used to propagate the historical continuity – ostensible or real – of the resurrected state. According to opinion polls, however, it is only in the past ten to fifteen years that a majority of Austrians believe they constitute a separate nation.

Periphery or centre

Like Ostarrîchi one thousand years ago, Austria as a member of the EU is once again the "border country". The northern and eastern borders, so recently freed of the Iron Curtain's barbed wire, are now borders of the EU. Controls are especially strict at border-posts on the frontier with Hungary; once again long lines of vehicles wait to cross. The Hungarian and Czech watchtowers have been replaced by soldiers of the Austrian army and members of a new border police, who patrol the frontier as part of Austria's commitment to the Schengen Agreement.

While the communists ruled over eastern central Europe, official Vienna made a point of stressing its function as a bridge between the blocs. Since the

dramatic collapse of Communism in 1989, though, Vienna has done precious little to warrant the role of mediator between East and West in a new Europe. In economic terms, the Germans have long been the leading investors in the region. Recently even the Italians appear to be taking as much, if not more, interest in the markets of central Europe than the Austrians, who have tended to look westwards since joining the EU. Indeed, once again many Austrians seem to expect the answer to their problems to come from that direction – and specifically from Brussels. Others are already turning away from the larger association – as in 1938 – in disappointment on realizing that an *Anschluss* alone is not the answer to Austria's problems.

For many Austrians, the Czech Republic and Hungary are "East", and Slovakia, just 50 kilometres from Vienna as the crow flies, is anywhere but at its gates. In better times, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) boasted a separate editorial staff for eastern Europe. Now, to cut costs, it has withdrawn its reporters from Prague and Budapest (the explanation of the new general director, who is interested only in ratings: the ORF needs reporters where Austrians go for their holidays). Today, reports from individual neighbouring countries are provided – if at all – by former East German journalists still based there.

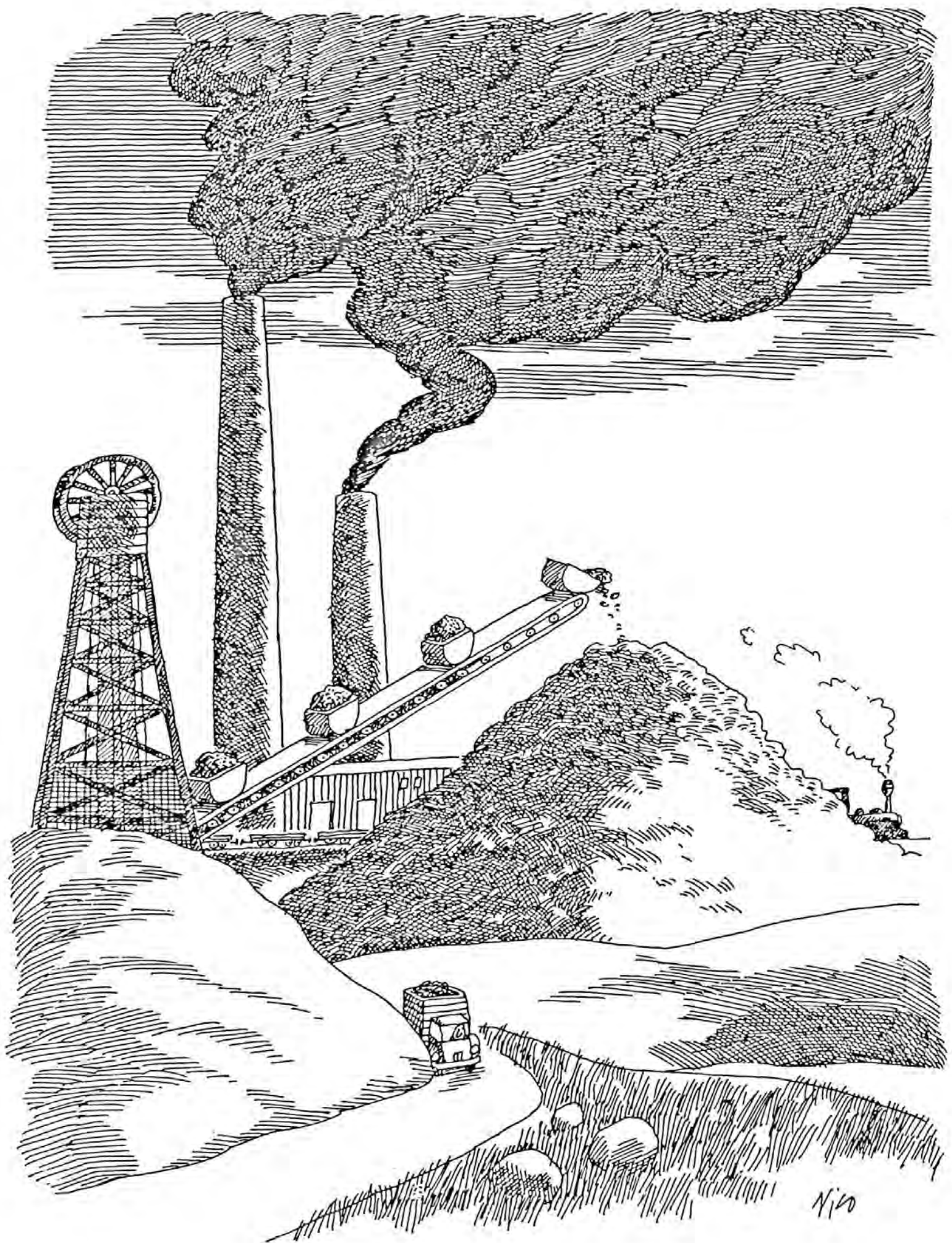
The medium-wave transmitter at Bisamberg, since the 1930s Vienna's popular voice in Warsaw, Cracow, Lvov, Ostrava, Kaschau, Debrecen, Transylvania and deep into Serbia – we touched on this in the first part of the book – has now been switched off; in its place a "Blue Danube Radio", a local station in Vienna, broadcasts in English. Cable television provides programmes from Turkey and even the Far East – for the sizeable Asian community in Vienna – but not a single programme from the former Habsburg crown lands, although Hungarian and Czech are still, even today, officially recognized as minority languages in the *Land* of Vienna.

Friedrich Heer, who spent a lifetime puzzling over what Austrian meant, once ventured: "There is no historical entity in Europe whose existence is more closely tied up with its members' problems of identity than Austria."

In his book *Die österreichische Seele* (The Austrian Soul)³, the psychoanalyst Erwin Ringel quotes a remark of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: "I think that the good side of Austria is particularly difficult to under-

stand; in a way it is more subtle than everything else, and its truth is never on the side of probability.”

Austria is what is remains of the millennium.



From the "Vienna Coal Station" to Moravian development pole

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The milestones along what is now part of the Czech railway network from the Austrian border at Břeclav (Lundenburg) to the Polish border at Petrovice u Karviné start in Vienna. One hundred and fifty years after the first "locomotive railway" of the Habsburg Empire was built, they still show the distance from the former imperial capital and residence of the Habsburg emperors: 270 kilometres to Ostrava-Svinov (formerly Schönbrunn-Wittkowitz) and 275 kilometres to the main station of the third-largest city in the Czech Republic, Ostrava hlavní nádraží (Mährisch Ostrau-Oderfurt). In 1847 – the year the first Swiss railway was opened between Zurich and Baden – the "Kaiserlich-königlich privilegierte Kaiser-Ferdinand-Nordbahn" (Imperial chartered Kaiser-Ferdinand Northern Railway), or "C.k. priv. Severní dráha císaře Ferdinanda" as it was known in Moravia, reached Ostrava.

At that time Ostrava/Ostrau lay on the border between Moravia and that slice of Silesia that Austria had retained in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years' War between Frederick II of Prussia and Empress Maria Theresia.

"Black California" was the name people gave to the rapidly expanding industrial conglomeration. The discovery of coal seams in the Silesian part of the city in 1767 marked a new beginning for the old market town at the confluence of the Ostrawitz and the Oder, which had received its city charter from the Bishop of Olmütz five hundred years previously. The railway was built primarily to transport coal; its potential as a link between the people of Moravia, Silesia and Galicia and the heart of the empire was a secondary consideration.

Dramatic economic development followed the opening of the Kaiser-Ferdinand-Nordbahn. Up to that point, the only industry in the small rural town not far from the Moravian Gap was a few modest textile factories. Quickly mocked as the *Wiener Kohlebahn* – "Vienna Coal Station" – Ostrava soon became a magnet for ironworks, machine tool firms and at a very early stage also chemical factories drawn by the "black gold". The city became one of the leading industrial centres of the Habsburg Empire.

Melting pot of the Dual Monarchy

The first blast furnace, named "Rudolfshütte" in honour of Crown Prince Rudolf, was built in 1830. In time the plant formed the heart of the Vitkovice Iron and Steelworks, one of the biggest in Europe.

Ostrava became the "steel heart" of the industrial empire of the Austrian line of the Rothschilds, a family of Jewish bankers from Frankfurt am Main who gained influence and titles throughout Europe.

In 1848 the city of crafts and trades had 2000 inhabitants, with more or less equal numbers of Czechs and Germans. By 1880, migration from nearby (today Polish and Ukrainian) Galicia as well as all parts of Moravia had raised the population to 13,400, or 56,700 together with the surrounding towns. By the turn of the century, these figures had almost trebled to 30,110 in Ostrava itself and 146,000 in the wider area. By the beginning of the First World War, about 190,000 people lived and worked in the conurbation.

Ostrava, at the time divided into a Silesian part (Schlesisch-Ostrau) and a Moravian part (Mährisch Ostrau), was a typical melting pot of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In addition to the rapidly growing Czech community, the city drew large numbers of Poles, Germans and Jews (most of whom tended to identify with the Germans).

Mining engineers and technicians were recruited from all parts of the empire, from northern Italy and Slovenia to Cracow and from Tyrol to Transylvania. Czechs, Poles and Germans each had their own "house", which served as cultural centre and occasionally also as a hotbed of ethnic rivalry (the "German House" was damaged in the Second World War and demolished after 1945; the Czech "Národní dům" and the "Polish House" are still standing). A German grammar school was opened in 1886 and a Czech one in 1897.

From Masaryk through Hitler to Stalin

In the first Czechoslovakian republic between the two world wars, Ostrava's industrial development made rapid strides in the period of economic expansion that characterized Masaryk's new state, which lasted until the crisis of the thirties. In 1930 Ostrava had 125,000 inhabitants and the whole metropolitan area 220,000. As the heart of the old town of Mährisch Ostrau was

transformed into a city in its own right, industry in the periphery continued to grow in a haphazard way. Since the last third of the 19th century, the quality of life had been declining as a result of environmental pollution and mounting social tensions. Even before the end of Habsburg rule, Camillo Sitte (1843–1903), a well-known Viennese architect, had made a first attempt to regulate the city's development. Unfortunately, of his plans, no further than a few rows of houses and a church were built.

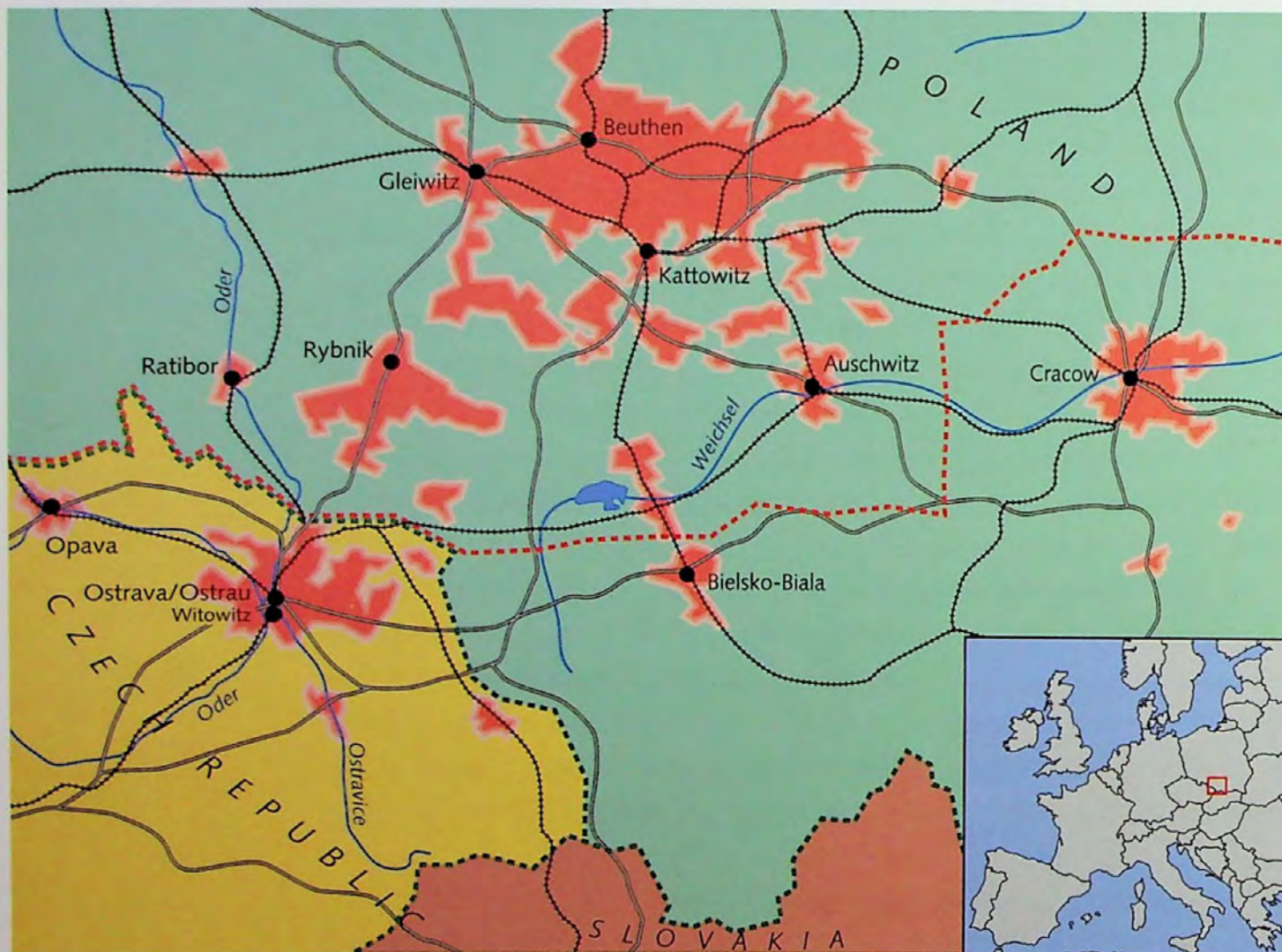
On 14 March 1939 German troops occupied Ostrava, one day earlier than the rest of Bohemia and Moravia. The Nazi occupation of the so-called Sudeten area in 1938 had already extended the borders of Germany to the gates of the city. At the same time, Poland had grasped the opportunity to annex part of the coal-rich Olsa region around Teschen (Česky Těšín/Cieszyn) for itself.

During the Second World War Ostrava became a centre of the German munitions industry, and the exploitation of man and nature was taken to extremes. As part of the "total war" effort, even under-age children were pressed into mining coal. The huge steelworks became an adjunct of the "Hermann Göring Works", the industrial complex built from scratch in the *Ostmark* (as Austria was called in the terminology of the Third Reich).

The murder of the Jews and the end of German culture

In this period, some 6000 Jews in Ostrava were deported to Nazi concentration camps in nearby Poland and murdered. They included many business people, lawyers and doctors who had been a vital part of Ostrava's society in the first republic. Ironically, the eradication of the Jewish element in Ostrava destroyed the social stratum which had upheld German cultural and intellectual values in the city – and the rest of Czechoslovakia – long before the Germans were expelled at the end of the Second World War.

One reason why German music and theatre continued to compete so healthily with Czech artistic expression in the 1920s and 30s was the active involvement of Jewish artists and patrons. Ostrava's German theatre had long enjoyed a reputation as one of the "training grounds" for the Burgtheater and the State Opera in Vienna, just as the Czech stage provided young talent for the large theatres in Prague. Thanks to the cultural flowering in this peri-



--- Border of Austria-Hungary in 1914

--- Present state borders

--- Railway lines

— Roads

■ Urban areas

od, Ostrava's art museum owned a respectable collection of modern art that ranged from Klimt, through the Czech cubists and expressionists (a very recent discovery in the West), to Kokoschka, whose forefathers came from this region.

Against this background, the expulsion of Ostrava's approximately 20,000 German citizens after 1945, a tragic end to the city's multiethnic culture, completed the work that Hitler began when he occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938/39 in the name of *Deutschtum*.

Postwar success measured in tons

The next victims were the Czechs themselves. Henceforth, Stalin's ideology of measuring success in terms of industrial output in tons would determine the fate of the industrial conurbation. Coal and steel were the pillars of "socialist reconstruction". Everything else was subordinated to this goal. Water, air and the entire environment were polluted. People were crowded into the prefabricated blocks of the new satellite towns, the antithesis of evolved urban architecture and history in stone. The imperial-yellow buildings in the old town centre were allowed to fall into disrepair: socialist Ostrava was to get a new, different face.

In the early 1950s a huge new steel plant was built, Nová Huta, a project originally planned during the German occupation. It was held up as an example to the whole republic. Once plans for the expansion of the Vitkovice Steelworks were ready on the drawing board, entire villages that had stood for generations were razed without any consideration for the inhabitants. The project was never completed. Later, gypsies from eastern Slovakia moved into the empty buildings. A people very different from the locals, the Roma arouse racist emotions among the area's long-time inhabitants – not unlike the situation in the former Sudeten area of northern Moravia.

However, the Roma are not the only demographic problem facing the city. In the years of the planned economy, growth in Ostrava and its environs was hardly less chaotic than in the capitalist era when it had been driven primarily by considerations of profit. In 1947, a year before the communist take-over, the city had 181,000 inhabitants and the metropolitan area a total of 206,700; the 1991 census reported 327,000 people in the city and 380,000

with the immediate environs. If one includes the rural hinterland, the whole industrial region of northern Moravia/Silesia has a population of over one million.

Development corridor from the Baltic to the Adriatic

Together with the adjoining Polish Silesian industrial region that runs from Gliwice/Gleiwitz through Katowice/Kattowitz to Cracow and from Ratibor to Bielsko-Biala, the Czech industrial cities of Ostrava, Opava (Troppau), Frydek-Mistek, Havířov, Karvina and Třinec constitute one of the largest industrial conglomerations in Europe. Shaped by coal and steel, this "Ruhr of central Europe" straddles an age-old trade route from the Baltic Sea to the Danube, the Black Sea and the Adriatic. Even in the High Middle Ages, trade flowed from southern Europe via Vienna, Brno/Brünn, Olomouc/Olmütz, Wrocław/Breslau, Poznań/Posen and Toruń/Thorn to Gdańsk/Danzig and Königsberg. The direction was changed to East-West only under Soviet domination.

Immediately after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution", people took to speaking of northern Moravia as a region wracked by crises and problems. Most of the readily accessible, profitable coal seams had been exhausted; a price slide triggered by a worldwide glut of steel coupled with new environmental regulations forced the closure of old, unprofitable mills. Pessimists in Prague forecast high unemployment and mounting social tension during the coming years of economic restructuring.

The reality was very different: Ostrava became a symbol of the Czech economic miracle. A capitalist spirit, the doggedness of a population of miners and a high level of technical education and training enabled the local economy to quickly adjust to changing circumstances. A new private construction sector, flexible small businesses and a rapidly growing service sector – virtually unknown in the region previously – provided employment for people thrown out of their jobs in the declining coal and steel industries. Labour shortages are already arising in certain specific fields and the unemployment rate is lower than the national rate, which itself is low by European standards.

In the meantime, under the leadership of the primator (mayor) of Ostrava, the largest businesses in northern Moravia and Silesia have formed a development company to attract capital and know-how to the region. Western European, American and Japanese firms have set up operations here, drawn by the potent combination of a skilled labour force and low unit wage costs.

It was no accident that in the 1996 parliamentary elections, the leaders of the country's largest political parties, prime minister Václav Klaus (leader of the centrist ODS party) and his Social Democratic challenger Miloš Zeman, both ran in the Ostrava constituency. Northern Moravia is the testing ground for many of the reform policies that the government hopes will catapult the Czech Republic back into the ranks of Europe's economic front-runners.

One hundred and fifty years after the railway from Vienna reached northern Moravia, it – together with the lines continuing northwards to Warsaw via Katowice and southwards from Ostrava via Vienna to Slovenia and Italy – has again become an important development corridor. If the European Union's plans are realized, its upgrading to a trans-European trunk route should be completed (with the help of EU funding) by the turn of the millennium.

"Istria was never partitioned"

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The Budapest-Ljubljana-Trieste InterCity train no. 260 *Drava*, named after the river of the same name, is running forty minutes late. Theoretically, it could still reach Trieste Centrale on time. The timetable allows three-quarters of an hour for the locomotive change and customs check at Villa Opicina/Opčine, the station at the Italian-Slovenian border. The train is half empty and the customs inspection is completed in a couple of minutes. The Italian locomotive is hitched up in less than five minutes. But the Italian railway officials insist, with an air of importance, on waiting the full 45 minutes; it is not their fault that the train was delayed in Hungary.

The Italians stare in disbelief when I ask why the Slovenian electric locomotives cannot complete the few kilometres from the suburb of Opicina to the station in Trieste. Both countries use the same (i.e. Italian) current, and the locomotives are of the same Italian make. "Ah, but the maintenance of the engines" comments the man in the grey uniform of the Ferrovie dello Stato, desperately grabbing at straws, "not to mention the principle of the matter. Where would it lead to if suddenly there were Slovenian locomotives in Trieste station!"

Apollo and Mercury

That was at Easter 1994. Trieste Centrale is the old station that the Venetian-born Viennese architect Karl Ritter von Ghega designed for the *K. und k. privilegierte Österreichische Südbahn* ("Royal Chartered Austrian Southern Railway") before 1854. The first European railway to cross a mountain range, it was one of the principal economic arteries of the Habsburg Empire, linking Vienna and the industrial centres of Bohemia and Moravia with the Austrian port of Trieste on the Adriatic.

Until the changeover to summer timetables at the end of May 1994, the InterCity *Drava* and the *Ljubljana Express* from Vienna connected in Ljubljana. The *Drava* was thus the last (semi-)direct connection via the historic *Südbahn*. If one wants to travel from Vienna to Trieste in one day now, one has to go via Villach, Tarvisio and Udine. The Italians invested a lot of money upgrading what used to be the secondary "Pontebbana" route from Carinthia through the Val Canale to the south, and are now doing all in their power to discourage the new flows of goods and passengers generated



Metres above sea level

- National borders
- Railway lines

- over 3000
- 2000-3000
- 1000-2000
- 200-1000
- 0-200

by the reviving economies of eastern central Europe from passing through Slovenia.

Ljubljana has responded by proposing to upgrade the second connection between Trieste and the north, the forgotten railway through Tauern, Karawanken and the Julian Alps. The imperial Austrian railways completed this line at great cost just before the First World War. The intention was to strengthen the competitiveness of Austrian Trieste by linking it with the industrial region of northwestern Bohemia around Pilsen and Budweis and with southern Germany. After the Gotthard and Simplon lines opened, the entrepôt trade shifted to Genoa.

The single-track line runs from the Karawanken Tunnel near Jesenice (Assling) through Bled (Veldes), the Wocheiner Tunnel and the Isonzo Gorge – scene of a bloody battle in the First World War – into the divided city of Görz, which the Slovenes call Gorica and the Italians Gorizia. Slovenia would like to electrify the line and build a connecting loop to the new Adriatic harbour of Koper/Capodistria, whose container port is already a serious competitor for Trieste: Koper's 1994 turnover was only about 20% less than that of Trieste.

Austria is also interested in Slovenia's plans to expand its railway network. Because the war in ex-Yugoslavia severed the link between Zagreb and Belgrade, it has not been able to recoup its investment in expanding the Tauern arterial route (the direct line from southern Germany through southeastern Europe to the Near East).

Built by Austrian engineers, the *Wocheinerbahn*, or "Transalpino" as it is known in Trieste, currently operates mainly as a romantic backdrop for steam-hauled excursion trains (and as a strategic diversionary route). The Slovenian plans would give it a new lease of life – at the expense of Trieste.

In the struggle between the "two souls in Trieste's breast" (the Trieste writer Claudio Magris calls them "Apollo and Mercury") at the time of the First World War the inhabitants of Trieste let their nationalist feelings blind them to economic reason and Trieste's traditional (Italian/Slav/German/Jewish) multi-ethnicity. A majority voted for *Italianità* – and thus against the economic future of the harbour city.

Five hundred years earlier the inhabitants of Trieste had made the opposite choice. To secure their existence in the shadow of Venice, the Adriatic's leading power, in 1382 they sought the protection of Duke Leopold III of Austria. Austrian rule was interrupted only once in all that time: by Napoleon, briefly.

When Austria was still a naval power

Trieste's architecture still reflects its Habsburg past, about which many of its inhabitants hold very romantic notions. But today the city has an empty feel to it: the quays are abandoned and the huge insurance offices have long since lost their customers in Budapest, Prague, Cracow, Zagreb/Agram and Chernovtsy/Czernowitz – just as the city has lost its hinterland in the Slovenian Karst region and Slovenian-Croatian Istria. If the Yugoslav crisis had not brought in a few American warships, Trieste's very un-Italian night-life would have ended even earlier: without the crop-eared, jeans-clad marines, the spartan little bars would be totally empty.

Koper is just under 20 kilometres from Trieste, and Pula (Pola under the Habsburgs) at the southern tip of Istria 125 kilometres away. Pula was once the home base of the Austro-Hungarian navy – not an insignificant force by any means – just as Trieste was once the seat of Austrian Lloyd and the Austrian merchant navy.

Trieste road signs consistently refer to the cities as Capodistria and Pola; one will not find signs in Slovenian and Croatian, although both are official languages of the city.

Tit for tat: in the Slovenia part of Istria Trieste is always "Trst"; all other signs are consistently bilingual.

"Trieste was the largest Slovenian city in the 19th century", so I learnt from one Slovenian. What he did not mention was that in Ljubljana/Laibach and Maribor/Marburg most people used German, and in Villach/Beljak and Klagenfurt/Celovec Slovenian.

Under Habsburg rule, Görz (Gorizia/Gorica) and Gradiska (Gradiška d'Isonzo), Trieste and Istria together formed the Litorale ("coastal region"), a Habsburg crown land. Although the majority of the population was Slav, in 1918 practically the entire area – which makes up a large swathe of modern

Slovenia and Croatia – was given to Italy. A group of partisans led by the nationalist Italian poet Gabriele d'Annunzio even temporarily occupied the former Croatian-Hungarian port of Fiume/Rijeka.

Under Benito Mussolini the Italians undertook what one Italian-speaking deputy in the Austrian imperial parliament had announced even before the turn of the century: there would be only one official language between the roof of the Julian Alps and the southern tip of Istria: Italian.

Only Italian could be used at school; any transgression was severely punished. In the Second World War Slovenia was partitioned between Germany and Italy. Italy now stretched to Ljubljana (Lubiana/Laibach); Kranj (Krainsburg), Maribor (Marburg) and Celje (Cilli) became part of the *Reichsgauen* (German provinces) of Carinthia and Styria.

Cold War on the Adriatic

Then the pendulum swung back. Tito's partisans took the whole of Istria and Görz, even occupying Trieste for a while. British and American troops reestablished "order": in the early stages of the Cold War the demarcation line between Italy and the new state of Yugoslavia threatened to become one of the major frontiers between the free world and the communist bloc.

The "Free State of Trieste" under supervision of the United Nations was divided into two zones. Zone A took in the city of Trieste and its suburbs, an area of 222 square kilometres with a population of 312,000, including 60,000 Slovenes. Zone B covered a part of Istria, 738 square kilometres with 73,500 inhabitants, one-third of them Italian. The number of indigenous Italians in all Istria was put at (an occasionally disputed) 350,000.

The British had command of Zone A; the Italian Trieste majority ran its administration. In Zone B, which had been overrun by Tito's partisans, communist Yugoslavia created an administrative *fait accompli* (much as the Serbs would do later in the parts of Croatia and Bosnia that they occupied).

After Tito broke with Stalin in 1948, the West lost interest in Trieste and its hinterland. The Trieste question became a nuisance. The London Agreement of 1954 essentially confirmed the status quo: Trieste was returned to Italy and Yugoslavia kept the hinterland. The territorial disputes were finally resolved by the Treaties of Osimo in 1975 (since the break-up of Yugoslavia,

though, Italy has raised certain points with the successor states Slovenia and Croatia).

Numerous Italians who had not fled from the partisans in 1944/45 left Istria in 1954 – some of them voluntarily as an expression of their hurt national pride, others under (not always gentle) pressure from the new rulers. Depending on whether one accepts the Slovenian or Italian figures, the number of so-called *esuli* (expellees) fluctuates from less than 200,000 to more than 300,000.

Market place of the past

Oprtalj/Portole was once a flourishing town on the old road from Trieste to Pula. The stone houses built on a hill, as well as the imposing church, could be seen from afar. The old terraced market place before the town affords a view far into the Istrian countryside. The particularly high quality of the cobblestone work in the narrow streets and squares and the beautiful doorways and window architraves bear witness to past prosperity. Yet three-quarters of the formerly well-appointed houses have been abandoned and their window panes smashed; here and there roof beams have collapsed.

Oprtalj/Portole lies ten kilometres on the Croatian side of the new Slovenian-Croatian border in Istria. On the Slovenian side, the highway (originally built by the imperial Austrian army) turns into a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. A simple border sign warns travellers against driving on into Croatia. A few kilometres earlier, the concrete sections of an apparently new tank trap lie by the side of the road. Slovenian police in military Land Rovers patrol the area.

There are no borderstones far and wide. While they were part of Yugoslavia, the autonomous republics of Slovenia and Croatia had never drawn a precise border. The story has it that one night the Croat Tito and his Slovenian confidant and chief ideologist Kardelj settled the border question in the course of a telephone conversation. The Croats later erected a sign on the main road from Koper to Rijeka: "Socialisticka Republika Hrvatska" (Socialist Republic of Croatia). Apparently a remark by Tito as he drove by one day – "What's that nonsense?" – was enough for the sign of sovereignty to disappear overnight.

To establish where the present-day border runs, one would have to consult the municipal land registers. These, however, date from the Habsburg era and apparently do not always meet the latest surveying standards.

A dying land

Borders do not mean anything to the old man and woman on the town square of Oprtalj/Portole. Leaning on her walking stick, the proud Italian counts not the states she has known in her 93 years, but the wars. "There was the Austrian War (1914-18), then the Abyssinian (Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, 1935/36), the Second World War and finally the Yugoslav War – four wars are too much for one life!"

"Portole is dying, is already dead", she says. "This land has no future". Her children moved to Trieste long ago. In winter, when the wind blows through the cracks in her old house, her daughter comes and takes her there too. In summer the old woman lives in Istria, in her memories. "You cannot imagine how wealthy and how beautiful this village once was. A lot of the young people here went to university. When the students came home on Saturday there was a party! Some of them became famous – doctors, lawyers, professors. One even became vice-president of Fiat in Turin, another a general; he died last year in Venice."

The son of the old man – "Thank God", says his father – also lives in Italy: "Lots of good food, *molti soldi* (lots of money)." The toothless old man will not reveal his nationality; the question about his mother tongue draws a diplomatic reply: he speaks Slovenian, Croatian, Italian "and a bit of German". He was an Italian soldier in the Second World War and later a Yugoslav migrant worker in Austria. He will not express an opinion about the new Croatian state: "No, no, no!". Except that the money is worth nothing, not even the new kuna, he says with a knowing smile. For him the countries of Europe fall into two groups, those with good money and those with bad.

For most of this century Istria has had bad money.

The old man points to a country road with hairpin bends, now in a state of disrepair. That once led down to the station on the narrow gauge line from Trieste to Poreč (Parenzo). He had ridden it. It travelled slowly and sedately, but always reliably – like everything from the Habsburg era. The Italians had

dismantled it in 1935 and taken the rails to Abyssinia. "Emperor-king Franz Joseph good man", the old man suddenly exclaimed. Later regimes only exploited Istria.

"Istria for the Istrians"

The local politician in Vrsar (Orsera) is a member of the opposition Istrian Democratic Party (IDS), which won the most votes in Istria in the last Croatian elections. "Throughout its history Istria was never partitioned", he says, embittered because the new border between Slovenia and Croatia has harmed the tourist trade. He is also aware that it will not be abolished. His answer is to make Istria a "region of Europe" with open borders – and a border between the region and the rest of Croatia: "We want autonomy within Croatia, political and economic." He illustrates the difference between ex-Yugoslavia and Tudjman's new Croatia as follows: "Previously all the money went to Belgrade and nothing came back; today everything goes to Zagreb and almost nothing comes back."

"Istria for the Istrians" is written on the wall of a house in one of the back parts of the town away from the areas frequented by the hordes of foreign tourists – the holiday villages, tennis courts and nudist beach. The Croatian flag flies on all public buildings to show who is in charge here. The Croatian coat of arms with its chessboard pattern hangs in a frame on the wall of all post offices, restaurants and service stations. Malicious tongues maintain that Istrians only hang it up because they prefer to pay homage to the coat of arms than to the portrait of the unpopular president in Zagreb.

War tourism

Last summer the Czechs were the largest contingent of tourists on the Croatian coast of Istria, followed by the Slovaks and Hungarians. They are said to have only filled the gaps left by the traditional holidaymakers in Istria, the Germans and Austrians, whom the war kept away. Istrians, complaining that the new visitors from the former East Bloc spend less, had another explanation: contingents of tourists in exchange for financing Croatia's rearmament.

"Istria has suffered all sorts of misfortune, invasions and plagues, but up to now it was never divided by a border," complains Fulvio Tomizza, a Trieste writer from Istria – one of the *esuli* who opted for Italy under the London Agreement of 1954 and moved to Trieste. Today he sometimes spends part of the summer in his Istrian-Croatian home village of Materada, after which his first novel, which appeared in 1960⁴, is named. In this key work Tomizza (a name of Slavic origin) described the desperate situation of Istria's Italian-speaking population in the 1950s. In its counterpart, *Gli sposi di via Rossetti* ("The lovers of the Via Rossetti"), which appeared in 1986, Tomizza describes the suffering of Trieste's Slovenes under Italian fascism, which took a particularly brutal form in this region.

It bothers Tomizza that "today I have to show my passport four times" on the trip to Trieste. He regrets that the new borders have reawakened the old prejudices between Slavs and Italians and between Slavs and Slavs. At the time he welcomed the emergence of the new Slovenian state. Having campaigned for more open borders between Italy and Yugoslavia, he would never have imagined that in the subsequent period all borders, even those in the mind, were to become so hermetic.

A musical evening in Piran

From the terrace of Saint George's Cathedral in the bilingual Slovenian-Istrian port of Piran/Pirano one can see the territory of three states. On the left lies the Croatian coast of Istria. On the right one can see Italian Trieste and Miramar Castle, built by the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, supreme commander of the Austro-Hungarian navy and governor-general of the Kingdom of Lombardy and Venice. (In 1864 Ferdinand Maximilian, brother of Emperor Franz Joseph, accepted the offer of the clerical conservative party and, with the support of French troops, had himself proclaimed Emperor of Mexico; but after the French withdrew, he lost the ensuing civil war against the republican troops of Benito Juarez, was taken prisoner, tried and executed by firing squad).

A "Piranese musical evening" (Piranski glasbeni večer) is planned in the renaissance cloister of the former Franciscan monastery. The Chamber Orchestra of the Coastal Land (on the bilingual poster: "Obalni komorni

orkester/Orchestra da camera del Litorale"), formed by former students of the Music Academy of Koper/Capodistria, is playing. The soloist is the first violinist of the Croatian Chamber Orchestra and a member of the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, the horn soloist plays with the Slovene Philharmonic Orchestra in Ljubljana, and the harp quartet comes from Trieste. The main piece of the evening is a work by the baroque composer and famous Italian violin virtuoso of the time, Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770), who was born in Piran. His monument stands in the town's main square – "To our son, a grateful Istria".

During the interval, a local Slovene quotes an Italian writer from Trieste, Giani Stuparich – an Irredentist who volunteered for the Italian army in World War I. Years later he wrote in his memoirs: "In Europe the peoples will either unite or they will perish; but before they can unite they must be free to be themselves."

The trains are still running between Vienna and Prague

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There is nothing about the train that glides punctually into the ice-cold night on the eastern side of Vienna's South Station to indicate that this is a "historic" journey. The through carriages to Bratislava (Pressburg), Čierna nad Tisou, Kiev and Moscow on this 31 December 1992 are the last destined for Czechoslovakia. At midnight this state will cease to exist.

On the Austrian platform the Czechoslovakian customs officers on the train for the one-hour journey to Bratislava have just said goodbye to their colleagues from Břeclav, who are taking the *Chopin* night express on the neighbouring platform, which leaves almost simultaneously for Warsaw (through Czech territory). In a few hours the two groups of officers will be public servants of different states.

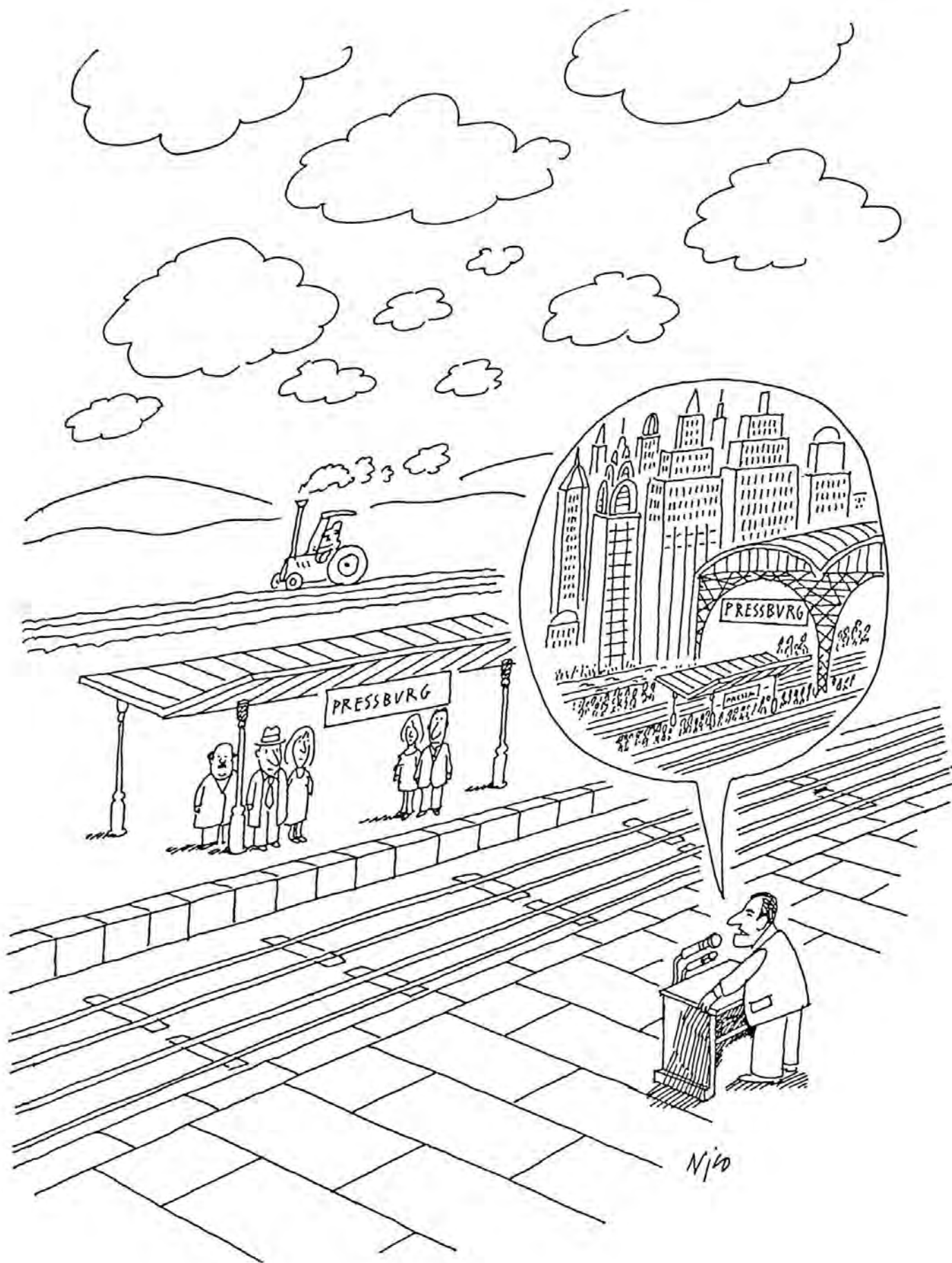
The train is not very full. Nor are the Austrians particularly interested in the birth of the new state on their border. A vocal group of young revellers from Burgenland have not caught the train to the East because of the historic occasion, but because alcohol is cheaper there.

"Martyrs" and "paternalists"

The streets of Bratislava are less busy than those a short while earlier in Vienna. About half an hour before midnight, crowds start to fill the "(Slovakian National) Uprising Square", which some already refer to by its old name, Hlinka Square (named for a nationalist Catholic priest of the inter-war period). An improvised stage conceals the partisan monument erected in the communist era.

More Slovakian flags appeared at demonstrations in recent months than are being waved this New Year's Eve. The organizers of the celebration take care to have them bunched together to create a better effect during the live television coverage.

Foreign television crews are especially interested in the only portrait on show of President Tiso, a fascist cleric who signed a pact with Hitler, which one man is ostentatiously holding in the limelight. In 1938 Tiso declared Slovakia independent and placed it under the "protection of the Führer". After Czechoslovakia was resurrected in 1945 he was condemned to death for high treason and executed. Nationalist Slovaks still speak of the "murdered priest" and honour Tiso as a "martyr".



According to the programme, the Czechoslovakian flag – from 1 January the flag of the Czech Republic – was to be lowered one minute before midnight. Fearing possible provocation, the authorities choose not to hoist it. The white-blue-red flag of Slovakia with its double cross on a shield does not rise up the mast punctually: the master of ceremonies on the stage first has to ask his “journalist colleagues” to make room for the soldiers of the Slovakian army to present arms in their new uniforms.

The noise of champagne corks and fireworks at zero hour is so loud that it drowns out the salvos fired near Petržalka (Engerau) on the right bank of the Danube. Vladimír Mečiar’s voice refuses to be drowned out. Flouting protocol, he grabs the microphone to announce to the Bratislavans that from now on their “international city” is the “capital of a new Slovakian republic that will finally show what it can do”.

An intellectual explains to me that the Slovaks’ curse is their perpetual “paternalism”. He has campaigned until the end for a joint Czechoslovakian state, and now throws his glass over his shoulder with mixed feelings. Because they have never been really free at any time in their history, and their nation has not evolved as naturally as that of other European peoples, Slovaks have always been compelled to resist some or other super-father, and in the next breath turn to a dictator for protection. If it goes wrong someone else is to blame – the Hungarians, the Czechs, the Germans, the clerics or the communists. If necessary, they are also prepared to believe – like the Serbs – that the whole world is plotting against them.

Fire and water

Another takes a less serious view of the situation: “Good, let’s take Mečiar’s word. Let’s show what we can do! For the first time in our history we Slovaks have the possibility to realize our potential. It depends on us, not the Czechs, whether we advance towards the West, or fall back into the East, into the company of the backward Ukrainians, Romanians and Bulgarians!”

At any rate, says a third, an end with tears is better than tears without end, which is where the relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks seemed to be heading. The results of the 1992 elections had been like mixing fire and water. A majority of Czechs had voted for Václav Klaus’s Civic Party and its

rigorous free-market policies, while the Slovaks had opted for the "Movement for a Democratic Slovakia" of Premier Vladimír Mečiar and his statist ideas. They could never have got along side by side – it would have been like driving alternately on the right and on the left of the partitioned streets of one and the same state. Then comes a typical afterthought: the Czechs of course would have got the better deal.

Danube waltzes and slivovitz

Music pours out of the loudspeakers, not Slovakian folklore, let alone a patriotic song, but *The Blue Danube*: Bratislava/Pressburg lies just 50 kilometres downstream from Vienna. The people dance to the familiar refrains of their joint Habsburg past – which also colours the architecture of the two cities. Later – gentle irony on the part of the disk jockey – they become independent to the music of the Beatles song *A Hard Day's Night*.

Many even drown their fears of an uncertain future on this New Year's Eve with the semi-sweet Slovakian sparkling wine that has replaced the formerly popular, and equally sickly, Crimean fizz.

Meanwhile, in a hut on the Moravian-Slovakian boundary – now the national border – in the White Carpathians (Bílé or Biele Karpaty) near Starý Hrožňom, Czechs and Slovaks who had worked together across the border in the 1989 "Velvet Revolution" celebrate jointly with Slovakian red wine and Moravian vodka. One of them, a well-known theatre producer and former activist and spokesman of the Slovakian "Public against Violence", had helped to shape government policies in Bratislava for two and a half years. After Mečiar's election, he had returned to his theatre career. This evening he and his colleagues proclaim the "Federation of the Spirit", which does not heed any state borders – "so that we do not degenerate completely into provinciality".

The next morning, despite a headache, he is satisfied to note that the trains to Vienna and Prague are still running.

Vlak Slobode – the “Freedom Train”

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The last few kilometres into Split are a triumph for Franjo Tudjman. Dalmatia has never received the Croatian president like this; the Adriatic coast has always been wary of him. People are even standing on their roofs to welcome the first train on the reopened line between Zagreb and Split. They wave flags and hold banners with the name “Franjo” on them. The train-driver never stops sounding his horn.

Planned and begun under the Habsburgs, but completed in the 1920s, the only rail link between the Croatian capital and central Dalmatia had been cut for more than four years. Two sections of “Croatia’s lifeline” had passed through the Serb-controlled territory of Kraina. Oluja (the “thunderstorm”), as the two-day reconquest in summer 1995 is known, re-established Zagreb’s control.

Hundred of workers and soldiers took just twenty days to clear the 423 kilometres of line from mines and to repair the sections of track destroyed in the fighting.

On 26 August 1995 a cheering crowd of several thousand at Zagreb’s main station sent the Vlak Slobode, the Freedom Train, on its way. The invited guests had to pay 1000 kuna for the trip (about 250 Swiss francs, a full month’s salary in Croatia). The money was to be used for humanitarian purposes in the war-scarred region.

From Zagreb to Oštarije, where the line divides into the Rjeka and Split routes, the same scene was repeated everywhere: hundreds, thousands of people lining the route or waving from windows and balconies. Old farmers’ wives in black wave flowers and jump up and down like young girls at the sight of the train bearing the president. Men in the uniform of the local militia hold up their children for him to see.

At Karlovac the inaugural train reaches the first of the towns on the former front. Shelled houses and churches, and sandbags still in place, are signs that the Serbian bombardments ended only a short time before.

As in Maria Theresia's time – Karlovac (Karlsbad) was an Austrian garrison and well-defended fortress on the Turkish front – the military dominated all aspects of life, for four years. Just 60 kilometres from the pulsating life of Zagreb, war was part of daily life in the self-proclaimed "Serbian Republic of Kraina". Secretly armed by America, the Croatian army took just two days to put an end to the terror.

A land without people

Beyond Josipdol, after passing an abandoned checkpoint on the one-time border of Kraina, there are suddenly no more waving and cheering people. The two helicopters that have accompanied the train at a discreet height drop down to escort the locomotive in low-level flight. The soldiers at the stations along the route are no longer harmless local militiamen, but specially armed elite units of the army and police force.

We travel through a ghostlike countryside. The villages are empty, not a person in sight. Cattle and horses frightened by the train gallop over unharvested fields. Pigs root in gardens between bolted heads of lettuce and withered tomato plants. The smashed doors and windows of the houses along the railway line bear silent witness to the fighting. Columns of smoke still rise here and there. A tractor stands in the middle of a field, abandoned by a farmer who must have left in a hurry. Flocks of birds in a vineyard take to the air, wheel once and settle down again as the train disappears around the next curve.

The major next to me worries about the land mines buried in the fields. Will anyone ever be able to farm here again? Shelled houses line the railway station of Gospić. A rusted Deutsche Bahn freight-car stranded here at the outbreak of war has been holed in several places by medium-calibre artillery. At one stop on the route Tadjman appeals to his fellow-countrymen abroad: Croatia needs them: "I guarantee all of you, who have so often wept as you worked far from the homeland – the labour of your hands will be at least as fruitful here in the heart of Croatia as anywhere in the outside world. Come and build a new Croatia, a new homeland with us!"

The approaches to Knin are desolate. Sheep-farming was the main occupation – the stony ground is suitable for little else. A town that the Croats

might regard as their earliest capital had become an unfruitful colony for the Serbs. The Kninska Krajina was the most western bastion of Orthodoxy and of Greater Serbia, the last outpost of Slav believers against traitors from their own southern Slav ranks – against the Roman Catholic Croats and Slovenes and their “Austrian” brothers, the Slovaks, Czechs and Poles.

Saint Vitus's Day and the Serbs

Remember the Field of Blackbirds, Kosovo polje, where the Serbs were decisively defeated by the Turks on 28 June, St. Vitus's Day, 1389. The Serbs had wrested Knin and the Kraina from the Turks. For centuries it has been the holy duty of every Serb to take revenge for the shame they suffered on the Field of Blackbirds, for centuries their proud people had to suffer under the Turkish yoke. There is no lack of objects and peoples, as long as they are foreign, on which to exact revenge for history. Stupidity chose St. Vitus's Day in 1914 as the day for Archduke Franz Ferdinand to visit Austrian-occupied Bosnia.

There is little that distinguishes Belgrade's contemporary nationalists from the Serbs of the Habsburg era. The use of arms and violent “solutions” have a long tradition; the trigger-finger was always itchy. The pictures they had of their neighbours were usually painted in hostile colours.

Gavrilo Princip – the advocate of a Greater Serbia who assassinated Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 – bought himself a Browning. Even the good soldier Schwejk in Prague knew that. The “People's Army” of Tito's Yugoslavia had equipped the Serbs of the Kraina, as they did their fellow-Serbs in Bosnia later, with the most up-to-date military equipment. Like Princip and his Belgrade organization, the Black Hand, they believed that their interests – national equity and self-determination – could only be achieved by force: against the Croats, Austrians and Germans, against the UN and the rest of the world.

By late summer 1995, there were no Serbian “fighting farmers” left in the Kraina. Blinded by propaganda, it had taken just two days for every single one of them to flee the advancing Croatian force. Many of them later settled in the Vojvodina or Kosovo, where, under pressure themselves, they started disputing the territory of the Hungarians and the Albanians.

"It will be difficult to settle people here again", an officer in Tudjman's triumphal train said to me. "We need a functioning infrastructure: doctors, pharmacists, craftsmen, lawyers, businesspeople, specialists." However, not even the Croats who lived in this devastated land before 1991 would ever return voluntarily: "That leaves the involuntary settlers: refugees from Bosnia, from the region around Banya Luka, from the Vojvodina in Serbia, from eastern and western Slavonia." The major, who comes from Osijek in the flat valleys of the Drava and Danube, has no idea how to turn cereal farmers from the fertile Save plain into successful goat and sheep farmers in the stony mountains above Knin overnight.

Bohemian villages

In my mind's eye I see Moravian and Bohemian villages in the Czech Republic. Five decades ago their German-speaking inhabitants were expelled. The Kraina Serbs are for the Croats what the Sudeten Germans were for the Czechs.

For centuries Czechs and Germans had lived alongside and with each other in a fertile cultural interaction without any difficulties. They were Bohemians both; indeed, Czech does not distinguish between "Czech" and "Bohemian" (both are "česky"). The linguistic nationalism of the 19th century introduced distinctions: German Bohemians marched in the Teutonic Society of the father of German gymnastics, Jahn, and the Czechs as "free Slavs" in the uniform of the invincible "Sokoln" (falcons).

Initially, Prussian Germany promoted both movements, the German national and the pan-Slavic. The first texts propagating violence were smuggled into Bohemia from the north over the Sudeten Mountains. In the struggle with Austria for German ascendancy, Bismarck was prepared to use any means, even Slav nationalism modelled on the German.

The poison had a lasting effect. It destroyed not only Austria-Hungary, but also the first Austrian and Czechoslovakian republics.

Before the expulsion – the last act in the common history of Germany and Czechoslovakia – it was impossible to tell the difference between "German" and "Czech" villages. Both had the same onion-shaped church tower, the new school built to celebrate Emperor Franz Joseph's golden jubilee in 1898,

the imperial-yellow municipal building and an “off-the-peg” station of the Austro-Hungarian state railways.

The distinction crept in after 1945, when the empty areas were resettled with people from eastern Slovakia, the Carpatho-Ukraine and elsewhere. Some of them were adventurers and pariahs in their own homeland, attracted by the prospect of building a new life on abandoned property with little effort.

In the former Sudeten areas today, the former German villages can be easily distinguished from the predominantly Czech ones: whereas the latter are neat and clean, full of flowers and freshly plastered houses, the former look run-down and dilapidated, as though their inhabitants had never really moved in. Most of the new settlers are still “strangers”.

The rubber stamp was in Cyrillic

Just one thousand people still live in Knin (compared to about 10,000 previously). Very few of those standing cheering with the soldiers on duty in the station square are locals. Their licence plates show they come from Zadar, Šibenik and elsewhere in Croatia. Even the new mayor of Knin – it goes without saying that he is a member of Tudjman’s HDZ Party – has only lived here a few days.

A few of the passengers on the Freedom Train kneel down and kiss the platform emotionally: for them Knin is “holy Croatian soil”. The town had been shelled several times. Nobody seems to notice that the architecture of the former medieval residence of the Croatian kings is now plain and unmistakably Balkan – even though its Serb inhabitants have fled, its outer appearance is still that of a Serbian outpost.

The Knin stationmaster proudly wears the Croatian colours on the lapel of his dress uniform. But the souvenir hunter who asks for a commemorative stamp will be disappointed: the stationmaster has thrown away his predecessor’s rubber stamp; it was in Cyrillic.

On a foggy December night in 1995, a goods train waits to depart for Hungary from Bruck station on the River Leitha. It is composed entirely of rolling stock formerly belonging to the Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR – the East German state railway). Not all that long ago, the flatcars had carried the Soviet forces eastwards on their withdrawal from Germany or had transported tanks of the National People's Army of the German Democratic Republic, most of which have since gone to the scrapyard. Now the four-axle wagons are carrying Nato battle-tanks eastwards.

On their way to the front in the First World War, the good soldier Schwejk and his comrades in the Austro-Hungarian army's "11th Infantry Battalion of the Prague City Regiment" had tussled with Hungarian Honvéds in the marshalling yards between the Lower Austrian town of Bruck and the Hungarian town of Királyhida (today Bruckneudörfl in Burgenland, Austria). They were fighting for the attention of a handful of local girls. Now, silent and freezing, soldiers of the Austrian army with red-white-red armbands stand guard while the sleepy white and black faces of male and female US soldiers stare out of second-class passenger cars at the bleak wintry scene. Though bearing the insignia of the newly formed Deutsche Bahn, the carriages are still painted in the light green and beige colours of the DR.

"Budweiser" from America

The train was one of many that ran from the US bases in western Germany through the Bohemian Forest, Moravia and Slovakia – or through Austria – to Hungary. The only US military base on the territory of the former Warsaw Pact lies near Kaposvár in the county of Somogy. The former Soviet airforce base at Taszár, eight kilometres outside of Kaposvár, from where MiG fighters would have targeted Italy in the event of a conflict, is now the logistics centre for the American units in the international Ifor peace-keeping force deployed in Bosnia under the Dayton Accords. All personnel and supplies pass through here.

In Kaposvár there is little sign of the American presence, apart from the few officers in the casino – an imperial-yellow building (formerly a hotel) on the little town's main square. The American soldiers are hardly less isolated from the civilian population than the Russian soldiers before them. The local

butchers and bakers have not made the anticipated killing. All the military's food comes directly from America via Germany. In the Taszár mess, soldiers order American Budweiser at American prices, even though Dreher, a cheaper Hungarian brand – not to mention genuine Budweiser (Budvar) – tastes much better.

The officers neither play cards for money nor buy their beers on tick as their Austro-Hungarian predecessors did. The only thing in Kaposvár that recalls the more romantic military times of the Habsburg Empire are the caps of the Hungarian guards. As a visible sign that the Sovietization of the Hungarian armed forces is a thing of the past, they have the same shape as the caps worn by the former Honvéds. Otherwise, one tries to appear "Nato-compatible".

"Forty years too late"

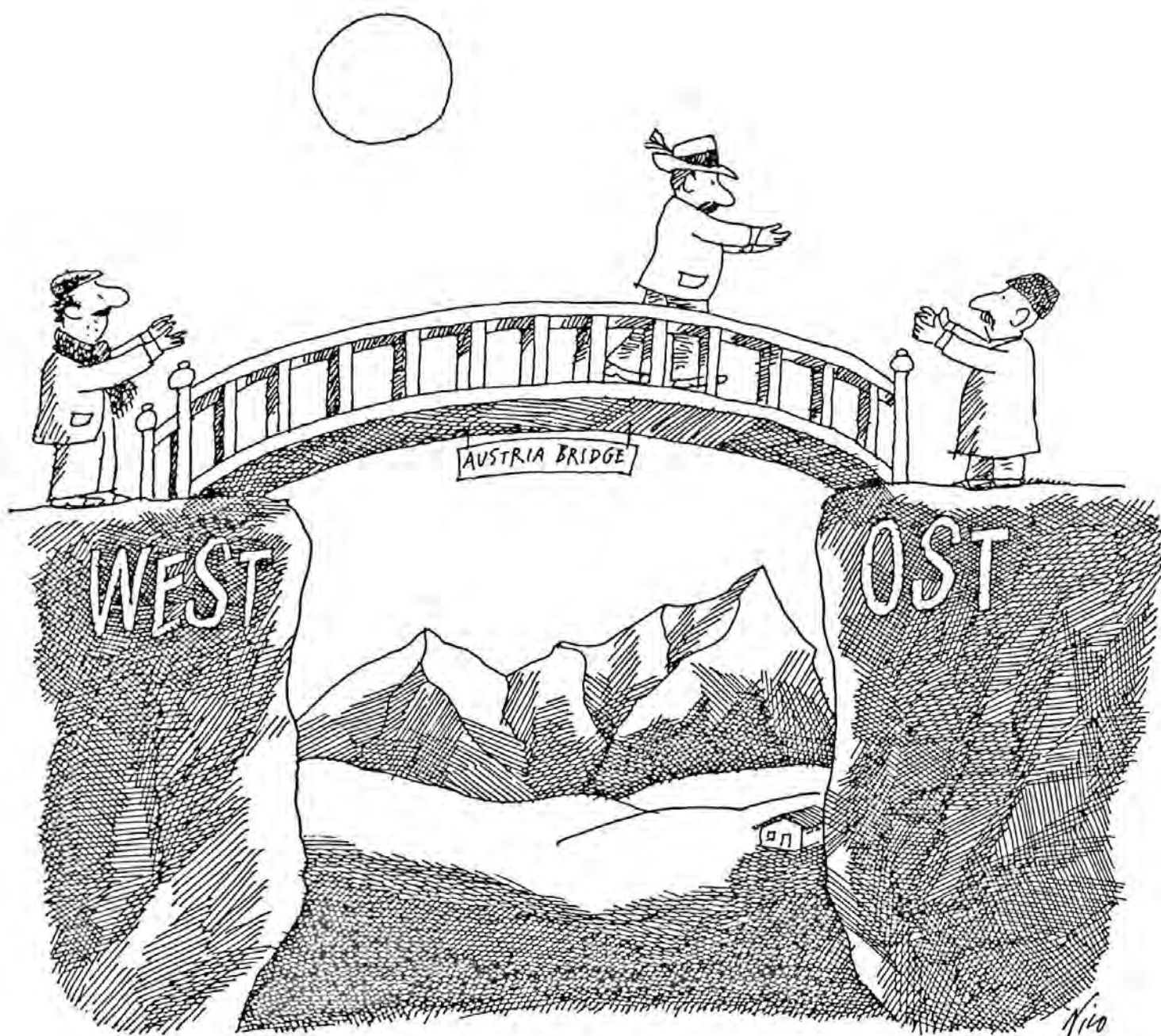
In the opinion of one old man in Kaposvár, who is thinking back to Hungary's failed uprising of 1956, the Americans have come to Hungary "forty years too late". As has been demonstrated most recently in Bosnia, "nothing gets done in Europe without America". Politicians from both the governing and opposition parties have got together to form a society, the Hungarian Atlantic Council, that works to make the Americans' stay here as pleasant as possible. There is a reception committee to welcome high-ranking military or political visitors to the "Taszár Air Base". Budapest hopes the Kaposvár base will become a permanent Nato base, as this would be a stabilizing element in an environment that Hungarians often find threatening.

When Serbo-Yugoslav aircraft attacked Croatian positions, some bombs fell – apparently unintentionally – on southern Hungarian villages. Along the Hungarian-Romanian border and the Hungarian-Slovakian border, former allies are eyeing each other with growing unease.

Hardly any country in Europe has suffered so much economic damage because of the UN embargo of Yugoslavia as Hungary, which is already burdened with the debts incurred by the former government.

European uncertainties

Some Magyars feel that the western Europeans have let them down. Back in the Soviet days, when Hungary was known as "the most amusing barracks in the East Bloc" and "goulash communism" was a media attraction, journalists and politicians streamed into the country. But hardly anybody is interested in its present problems, such as the difficulties of its economic restructuring or the growing impoverishment of broad sections of the population. Admittedly, it has not been completely forgotten that Hungary was the first country to prize open the Iron Curtain. Yet, when German chancellor Helmut Kohl inspected the Austrian-Hungarian border in summer 1996 on the anniversary of the first "hole", he was accompanied by the Austrian chancellor and not the Hungarian prime minister, who as foreign minister in 1989 was responsible for his country's decision to resign from the socialist association of prison-warders.



"Imperial yellow" as used in this book is not a metaphor for nostalgic longing for the monarchy and Habsburg rule. These had outlived their purpose by 1918. And the last Habsburg sovereigns have to bear some of the responsibility for the fact that for much of this century the great majority of the empire's successor states have not managed to produce anything better. The seeds of the scourges that devastated Europe between Sarajevo 1914 and Sarajevo 1992 were sown in the days of the empire, particularly during the long reign of Franz Joseph.

Rather, imperial yellow symbolizes the struggle of the countless people and peoples between Cracow and Dubrovnik, Feldkirch and Kronstadt to build a common house that was fit to keep out the wind and the rain. Imperial yellow was simply that colour that proved to be the most weather resistant. The yellow wash held better than all other tones, white, red or brown. Great nations have their Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; the eastern central and southeastern Europeans have their imperial-yellow monuments erected by unknown, pragmatic master-builders.

It was not a coincidence that Gorbachev coined the concept of the "European House" in Prague. Given the location, one cannot really imagine the house in any colour but imperial yellow. "Europe between the powers", from Gdansk/Danzig to Kotor and from Eger/Cheb to Lemberg/Lvov, is a fated zone. Its "return to Europe" after almost five decades of communist domination has not diminished this fatedness – witness the Balkan War. Imperial yellow is the counter-evidence that there are also communal values that have withstood all weathering.

Early legacy

Imperial yellow is not so much a symbol of the Habsburgs, whose requiem even a Marxist like the Croat Miloslav Krlježa sang. Imperial yellow is a symbol for a vital European experience whose roots go back far beyond Habsburg Austrian rule. The Habsburgs only inherited it and administered the legacy passably well for a few centuries. Ottokar II of the Přemysl dynasty and the Luxembourg emperor Charles IV had already laid the foundations in Prague. George of Podiebrad (1420–1471), who won the Bohemian crown with the support of the Hussites, came to an agreement with his Hungarian

adversary Matthias Corvinus (1443–1490) and, as first European ruler, designed a union of equal peoples and states with institutionalized mechanisms of arbitration similar to those that the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now OSCE) would devise in the last quarter of the 20th century (but failed to apply when faced with civil war in a disintegrating Yugoslavia).

Diversity is strength

Today imperial yellow reminds us that no other colour has been so closely identified for so long with such different and contrary nations as those of the Slav, German and Latin influenced region of "Europe between the powers". Over and above this, it demonstrates that Europe does not stop at any EU external border – most certainly not that of the signatories of the Schengen Agreement, which are being controlled with increasing rigour.

An earlier central European ruler, St. Stephen, first Christian king of Hungary (died 1038), formulated what still holds for all Europe: "Regnum unius linguae imbecille et fragile est" – a kingdom that speaks only one language is weak and fragile.

In his booklet *Der Ort wahrer Grösse – Millenarisches im Goldenen Tiger zu Prag* ("The Place of True Greatness – Millennial Conjectures at the Golden Tiger in Prague"), Rainer Leignitz, for many years cultural and press attaché at the Austrian embassy in Prague (before that in Berne), wonders about the meaning of a legacy that began one thousand years ago with the gift of a farmstead at Niuvanhova:

"Recognizing the force that diversity can lend to a community when diversity is recognized, respected and raised to a principle of state, resulting in the rejection of national uniformity and 'ethnic cleansing', is one of the most valuable heirlooms bequeathed to the Habsburgs. It gave that 'in-between' empire which girded Europe, coalesced under the general term Austria and held together for an age, its historical legitimacy."

The history of Europe and of the greater, "imperial-yellow" Austria is also the history of the tragic disregard of its power.

Seven years after "returning home to Europe", many eastern central Europeans still sense a disregard for the political, economic and cultural opportunities they can offer the continent as a whole.

Havel's warning

The first part of this book opened with a quotation from Václav Havel. In it, the Czech president speaks of the "range of opportunities ... for better or for worse", that have opened up with the changes in the former East. At the last follow-up conference of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in Budapest in December 1994, Havel presented a sober (and sobering) assessment in the light of Europe's failure to react to the "daily suffering and death of Europeans in former Yugoslavia" and the West's hesitation about facilitating access to Nato and the European Union for eastern central European states willing to take the plunge:

"I cannot deny the impression that shaping Europe's stable new order is a slower, more laborious and more difficult process than most of us expected it would be in 1989."

Havel cautioned the assembled heads of state and government against losing more time:

"The longer democrats hesitate about constructing a new European order, the greater will be the danger that others will shape our part of the world – by which I mean nationalists, chauvinists, populists and extremists of all varieties. In the end, we may be left with just the shocked realization that Europe had passed up a great opportunity yet again."

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